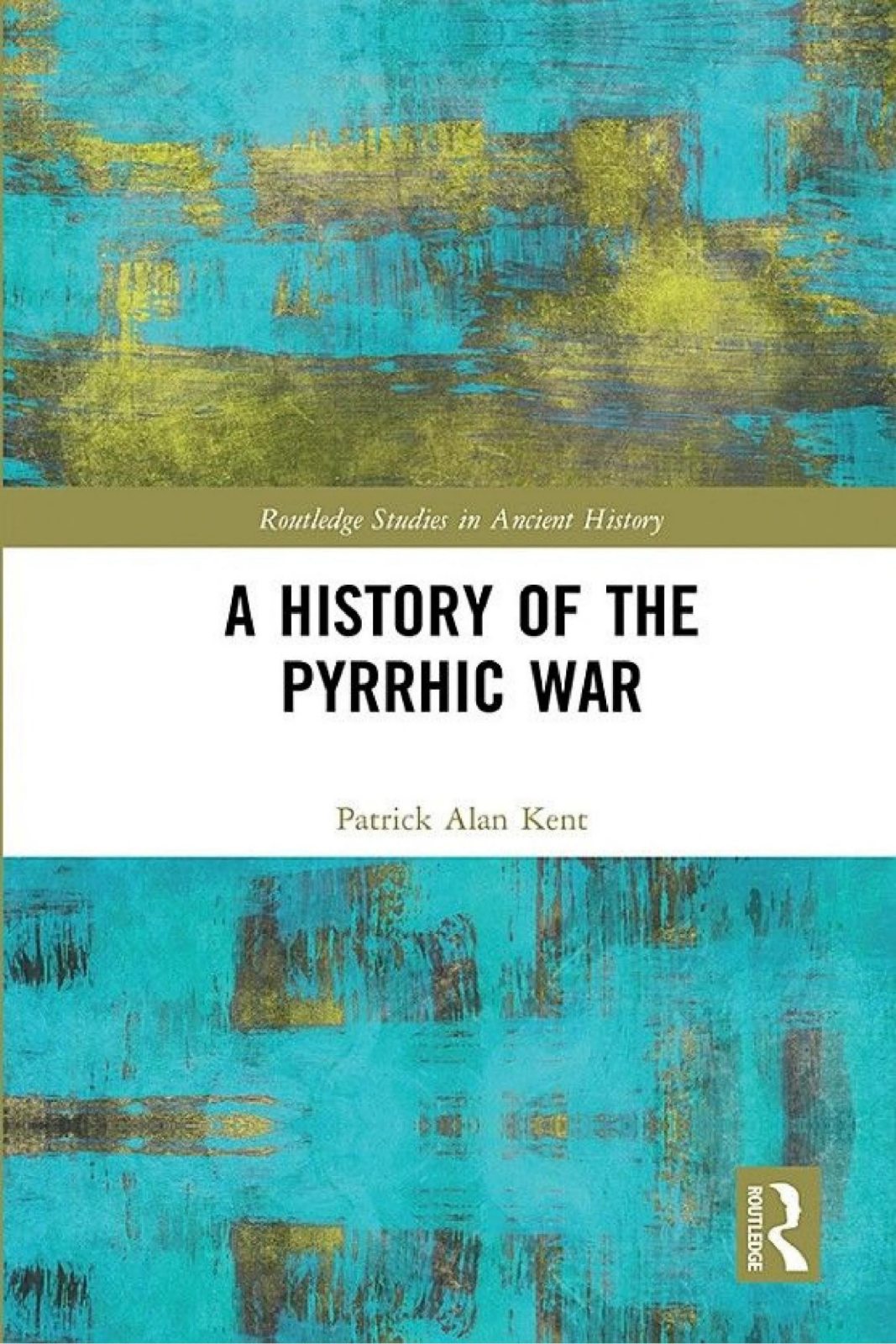




Routledge Studies in Ancient History

A HISTORY OF THE PYRRHIC WAR

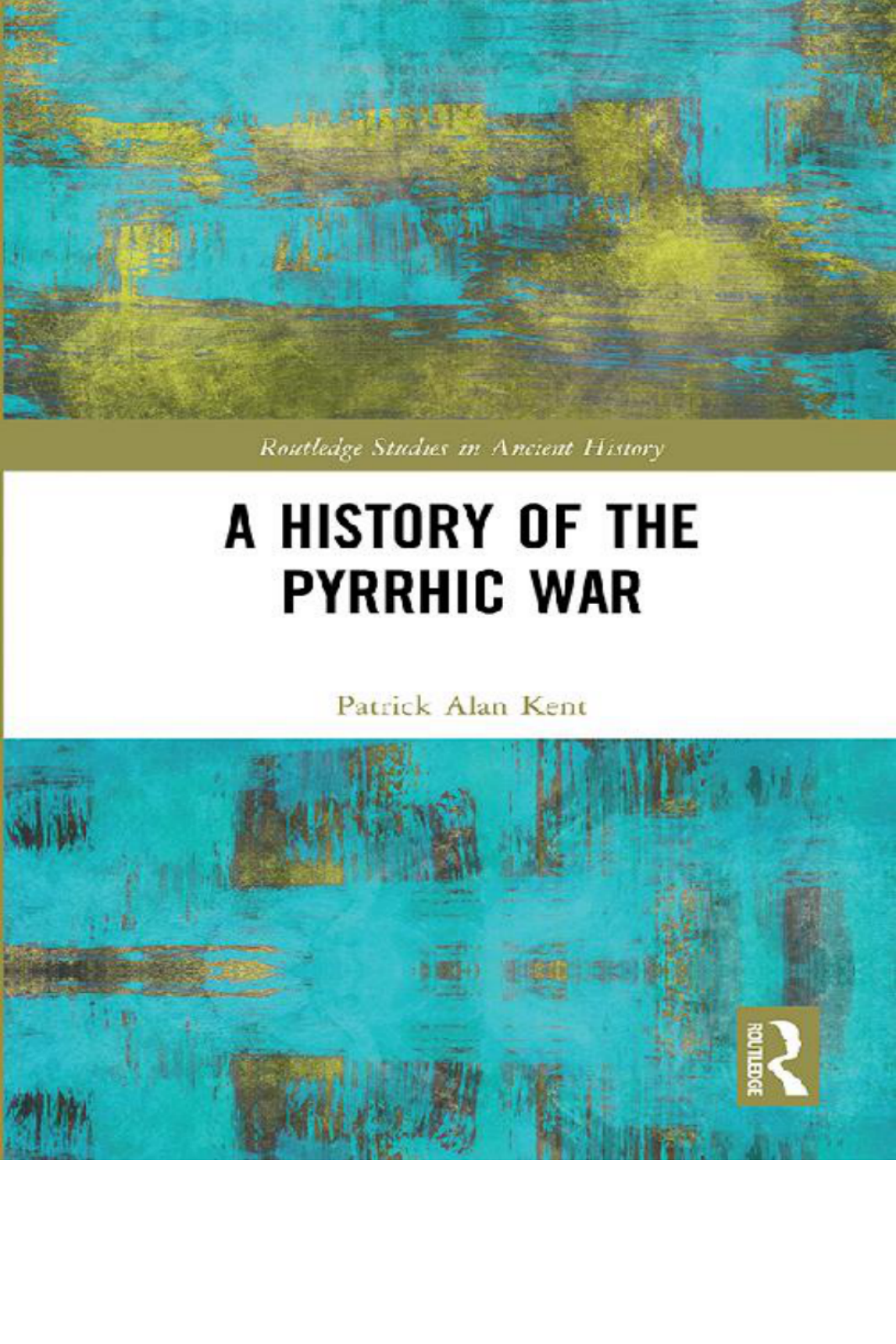
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A HISTORY OF THE PYRRHIC WAR

Patrick Alan Kent



A History of the Pyrrhic War

A History of the Pyrrhic War explores the multi-polar nature of a conflict that involved the Romans, peoples of Italy, western Greeks, and Carthaginians during Pyrrhus' western campaign in the early third century BCE.

The war occurred nearly a century before the first historical writings in Rome, resulting in a malleable narrative that emphasized the moral virtues of the Romans, transformed Pyrrhus into a figure that resembled Alexander the Great, disparaged the degeneracy of the Greeks, and demonstrated the malicious intent of the Carthaginians. Kent demonstrates the way events were shaped by later Roman generations to transform the complex geopolitical realities of the Pyrrhic War into a one-dimensional duel between themselves and Pyrrhus that anticipated their rise to greatness. This book analyzes the Pyrrhic War through consideration of geopolitical context as well as how later Roman writers remembered the conflict. The focus of the war is taken off Pyrrhus as an individual and shifted towards evaluating the multifaceted interactions of the peoples of Italy and Sicily.

A History of the Pyrrhic War is a fundamental resource for academic and learned general readers who have an interest in the interaction of developing imperial powers with their neighbors and how those events shaped the perceptions of later generations. It will be of interest not only to students of Roman history, but also to anyone working on historiography in any period.

Patrick Alan Kent is an Adjunct Professor at Jackson and Mid-Michigan Colleges in Michigan, USA. His research interests include the development of Roman relations with the peoples of Italy in the fourth and third centuries BCE.

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**For Alan, Connie, Josh, and April,
without whom this would not have
been possible.**

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CAH

DH

FGrH

MRR

SIG

Cambridge Ancient History, 2nd ed.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*.

Fragmente der griechischen Historiker.

Broughton, T.R.S. *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*. New York, 1951.

Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum, 3rd ed.

Maps

Map 1 Italy in the early third century BCE

Map 2 Sicily in the early third century BCE

1 Remembering the Pyrrhic War

In the spring of 280 BCE, King Pyrrhus of Epirus surveyed a battlefield near the city of Heraclea in southern Italy. He had come to the peninsula to defend the city of Taras (later known as Tarentum) from attack and now faced Roman infantry pushing across the river that split the field. Resplendent in his armor, Pyrrhus cut a dashing figure. His purple cloak was accented with gold, his helmet unmatched in its workmanship. The king wanted to be seen at the head of his band of cavalry, commanding his men and, when necessary, entering the fray himself. Whenever his men faltered, Pyrrhus appeared at the head of his Companions to reinforce the line and inspire his men to stand strong. Thanks to his spirited efforts, the Epirote army withstood the assault and began to press the Romans back in turn.

But Pyrrhus' conspicuousness had not gone unnoticed on the opposite side of the fight where another man was watching closely. Oblacus Volsinius led his own band of Ferentani cavalry as a Roman ally. As Pyrrhus moved across the battlefield, Oblacus mirrored him, waiting for an opportunity. One of the king's Companions, Leonnatus, noticed the Italian and warned the king that wherever he went Oblacus "watches you and keeps his eyes fixed on you."¹ Pyrrhus brushed off the caution, confident that the man would not be able to get close. But the pause to speak was all of the opening Oblacus needed; he had been hunting Pyrrhus, looking for a chance to fight him one-on-one. Killing the king of Epirus would bring him unequalled renown and would win the war in one fell blow. Tracking Pyrrhus was not difficult given his armor, but he had also always been in the thickest fighting and unreachable. Now Oblacus leveled his spear and charged.

Pyrrhus had been wrong. Followed by his men, Oblacus made it through the king's bodyguards. Luckily for the king, Leonnatus had heeded his own advice and reacted quickly. He swung his horse around and speared the Italian's mount as he closed in. Even as he fell, Oblacus managed to kill Pyrrhus' own horse, sending him to the ground as well. Some of Pyrrhus' bodyguards snatched up their king and sped away from the threat. Robbed of his chance at glory and now surrounded by the rest of the king's Companions, Oblacus did not

go down easily, fighting defiantly to the end. After being wounded countless times, he finally collapsed. Seeing him fall, Oblacus' loyal compatriots fought their way to his body and carried their fallen leader away in a final act of honor.

For Pyrrhus, the encounter with Oblacus had shaken him. He felt vulnerable in his visibility. Fearing another attack on his person, the king switched armor with the more utilitarian set of his companion Megacles. Pyrrhus continued to reinforce his lines as needed, but now behind the protection of his men. His caution proved well founded as Megacles was killed by another man from the Roman army named Dexous, who had also been seeking Pyrrhus. Believing himself triumphant, Dexous carried off Pyrrhus' armor and cloak as confirmation of his death. The Romans went on the attack, inspired by the supposed death of the enemy leader. Realizing the danger, Pyrrhus cast off the plain helmet he was wearing to show his men that he lived. While the king's efforts stabilized the situation, his men were still being pressed hard.

The battle of Heraclea flowed back and forth, but in the end it was neither Pyrrhus nor those that hunted him that won the day. It was said to be a far more exotic factor. As the Roman attack was again brought to a standstill, they faced an unexpected threat. Pyrrhus had come to Italy with elephants, massive creatures with towers mounted on their backs, which charged into the Roman lines. The legionaries stood for a time, but could not face this unknown terror. Pyrrhus was merely a man, albeit one who could fight and lead with equally deadly skill, but it was the beasts that he unleashed that defeated the Romans. At the end of the day the king of Epirus owned the field of battle after a bloody fight that had nearly cost him his own life, but it had also come at a massive cost as he lost nearly as many men in the fighting as the Romans.

The description of the battle of Heraclea is a gloriously heroic tale of combat that grips the reader, who is unsure of what is coming next. The flow of the fighting, with each side seemingly on the cusp of victory at various points, is unpredictable in its twists and turns. It is actually quite typical of the various episodes of the Pyrrhic War, which are full of intrigue, honor, virtue, and betrayal. It is all quite literally fantastic, and it is impossible to accept at face value. The Roman descriptions of their war with Pyrrhus were filtered through centuries of retellings, exaggerations, and interpretation. The conflict is wonderfully malleable, taking place generations before the development of historical literature in Rome. Pyrrhus became a second Alexander the Great bent on the conquest of the west, facing the burgeoning power of Rome in a grand duel to decide the fate of the Mediterranean.

But the Pyrrhic War was not what later Roman generations imagined. By evaluating the way in which the Romans constructed their idea of the war in combination with the geopolitical situation of the western Mediterranean, a clearer picture emerges. Pyrrhus did not intend to conquer Italy, Rome, Sicily, and Carthage, but instead pursued a more limited goal of bringing the Greek cities of southern Italy and eastern Sicily under his control. However, he failed to understand the complexity of affairs in the west, entering an area of wars and shifting alliances that had been ongoing for decades. This was not a war of Romans versus Pyrrhus, but a multipolar regional conflict involving Carthaginians, Samnites, Tarentines, Syracusans, and many others, with each of them pursuing their own interests. It is necessary to penetrate the Roman narrative, shaped as it is by anachronisms, in order to understand the events of the Pyrrhic War beyond the fabulous stories of Obolus and the elephants.

The sources

The Pyrrhic War was a significant part of many ancient works. While overshadowed by the subsequent Punic Wars and the person of Hannibal, Pyrrhus and his campaigns in the west remained a subject of fascination to later generations. Unfortunately, what has survived down to the present day is problematic to put it mildly. No contemporary Roman sources existed. Those works written a century or more after the war freely molded events to fit their own agendas, but they are now nearly completely lost. Subsequent writings, composed even later, survive largely in fragments. Literary materials are thus late, incomplete, given to the fanciful, and filtered through generations of anachronisms. While there are limited archaeological, numismatic, and epigraphic materials that help, it is unfortunately these difficult literary materials that must be relied upon for the framework of events.

Before the first historical compositions of Fabius Pictor and Ennius at the dawn of the second century BCE, Rome had a semi-oral historical tradition. Memories of the First and Second Punic Wars (263–241, 218–202) were still accessible through living individuals who had participated in them for the first generation of Roman historians as a communicative source of information. But for the major events and narratives of the period prior to the wars with Carthage tradition was passed down orally through the aristocratic families that dominated society, supplemented by monuments, inscriptions, and priestly records that provided more specific, if often isolated, information. It was the oral traditions of the *gentes* that served as the narrative framework of the Roman past before the mid-

third century, which were themselves glorifications of the great deeds of ancestors that reinforced contemporary status.

The reliability of the Roman historical tradition before the Punic Wars is problematic in terms of how far back in time it can be trusted with any kind of certainty. Roman history as it was first composed in the second century exhibits a floating gap common to societies whose past is preserved through oral traditions.² As the first historians and poets began to write, they could rely upon direct knowledge of the past from living members of society who had lived through those events. Those individuals could also relay the stories they had been told of the recent past. This living memory stretches back decades, but typically does not extend past around 80 years as it is limited by the death of individuals and their knowledge. In the more distant past, the origins of societies are often detailed and elaborate as events become legendary and/or mythical in nature. The foundations and early history of Rome bear characteristics of a strong oral tradition as preserved in the expansive surviving compositions of Livy, Virgil, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and others. These events were fluid in their nature, as can be clearly seen in Dionysius' brief overview of the varied stories of the foundations of Rome beyond the 'official' Augustan version of Romulus and Remus.³ In the earliest written histories of Rome, a good deal of space is devoted to the period before the Decemvirate in the mid-fifth century and after the start of the Punic Wars in the mid-third century. But in between these two peaks, events were skimmed over in much less depth, the floating gap.

It was in the early first century BCE that the annalistic tradition developed into the expansive and detailed compositions that would culminate in the histories of Livy, Dionysius, and others, followed by the imperial era histories. The floating gap period of Roman history represented a challenge for the annalists in fleshing out events into a more pleasing compositional form. They had the dual task of preserving the past in a more or less accurate fashion while also innovating its presentation, as Livy notes in the opening of his own history.⁴ Little additional information could be gleaned from the magisterial *fasti* or pontifical records, which preserved few relevant details. The oral traditions of the *gentes* were more elaborate in their narratives, but subject to exaggeration and a lack of objectivity meant to glorify their ancestors above other contemporary families.

The Pyrrhic War (281–275 BCE) falls right at the end of this less detailed gap, creating opportunities for ancient writers to add their own flair to a greater degree, which also complicates interpretation of events for modern scholars. The transition of Roman history from oral to written is of importance here as the Pyrrhic War took place on the edge of living memory, creating a series of events that are both based

in a remembered reality but also subject to the exaggerations of a more legendary period. This chronological quirk results in a unique dynamic between the legendary and the mundane. The narrative of the war is at the same time established and plastic, malleable enough for Roman historians to shape into a grand epic but still beholden to a basic framework of events.

Roman historical writing, which first developed around 200 BCE, was as much a literary pursuit as one dedicated to finding the reality of the past. Modern scholars struggle with authorial elaboration, invention, and omissions, especially concerning periods where ancient writers had little living or documentary information. The useful tool of analysis for such evidence is contradiction, where one source, literary, archaeological, or otherwise, can be contrasted with another. But for the Pyrrhic War in particular and pre-Punic War Roman history in general, there are rarely multiple sources to compare. Archaeological materials have been a great boon to the study of early Italy and greatly contributed to the growth of that area of study in recent decades. Such evidence, in conjunction with numismatic analysis, helps expand our understanding of the peoples involved in the Pyrrhic War, but is less useful in the context of the military and diplomatic machinations of the conflict. There are multiple literary sources concerning the events of the Pyrrhic War, which sometimes contradict one another. However, those contradictions may be the result of layers of invention by ancient writers elaborating upon a narrative with little authentic detail.⁵ In other words, differences between Plutarch and Dio Cassius, both of whom wrote in the Imperial Period, may be due to reliance on different historical traditions that invented the details of the narrative rather than old and presumably more reliable evidence.

One example is the Romans' tendency to see members of the same family acting in similar fashion, which later generations were expected to emulate. As such, in an instance where a writer found a member of a certain family present during a past event but with little detailed information, he could fill in the blanks with perceived familial characteristics.⁶ This historical inclination was reinforced by the traditions handed down in the families themselves. The *gens Decia* personified a military and religious ideal; victory and piety. Two Decii co-led Roman armies at two critical battles, against the Latins at Veseris in 340 and against a coalition of Italian peoples at Sentinum in 295. In both, the Decii sacrificed their own lives through a religious ritual (*devotio*) that ensured victory. Their actions serve as models for later Romans through their self-sacrifices in battle.

There was a Decius too at the battle of Ausculum in 279 where the Romans fought Pyrrhus.⁷ The annalists showed little compunction about making sure events fit within their histories regardless of minor

discrepancies. Some ancient sources claim that the Pyrrhic War Decius died after devoting himself to the gods, while others insist that he lived. Of course, none of this really mattered to the annalists. Their overarching historical narratives are not really affected by the specific stories of the Decii. The stories serve a superseding thematic and exemplary purpose that, in Roman eyes, justified its own existence. A Decius was at Ausculum, an important battle in a momentous war; he must have acted as other historical figures of that name supposedly had. The fact that he was probably not even a member of the same *gens* as those Decii at Vesperis and Sentinum did not matter. The story of his at least attempted sacrifice was important, not its reality. There is no doubt that a Decius commanded at Ausculum, but his actions were elaborated upon by a (probably false) family trait in order to make the narrative more pleasing.

While the Roman past was flexible to some degree, aristocratic competition kept things in some boundaries.⁸ Even when fleshing out their stories, the annalists were bound within a larger framework that often prevented them from crafting large-scale fabrications *ex nihilo*. Exaggerating the deeds of a consul during his time in office was one thing, but creating false consulships for ancestors was far more difficult and likely to be challenged by other interested parties. The *fasti* and other records served as a check as well. (The Augustan age would further solidify the central narrative of Roman history.) The result is a somewhat trustworthy overarching framework of the Roman past as events approached the third century. Of course further distance in time, the less reliable any information becomes, with the events of the early fourth century and before taking on a much more legendary quality reflective of oral tradition.

Among the literary sources that survive concerning the Pyrrhic War, there is a basic framework of events that can be trusted within the grandiose and often fantastic events described.⁹ The war did occur, battles and negotiations took place, and many peoples of Italy and Sicily were involved. In addition, not all contradictions between sources are due to invention; some are in fact the result of differing historical traditions and can be evaluated in that light. For example, when Pyrrhus and the Romans were negotiating peace after the king's victory at the battle of Heraclea, the sources present two proposals from Pyrrhus. The first is modest and not too demanding because, we are told, Pyrrhus was impressed by the Romans and wanted to be allies with them. He had come to realize the virtue of the Roman people and is portrayed more as a suppliant. The second characterization that is described by Appian and the *Ineditum Vaticanum* is harsh, indicating a less favorable tradition that survived into later periods.¹⁰ Appian gives a less positive image, undermining

the constructed image of Pyrrhus as the misguided and regretful antagonist. Similarly, he complicates the start of the war, placing some blame from the naval attack by the Tarentines on the Romans for violating a past treaty that forbade them from sailing past the Lacinian Promontory. It seems unlikely that later Romans would invent a humiliating peace proposal from their enemy that they nearly accepted or a treaty that shifted some blame for the war to themselves.

In the end, the events of the Pyrrhic War must be evaluated individually. A broad combination of source criticism, consideration of the literary themes that pervade the narrative, comparison with relevant numismatic and archaeological sources, as well as consideration of the geopolitical situation can penetrate the legendary nature of the war to some degree. Of course, a great deal is invented about the war, which is still useful in what it tells us about the way in which the Pyrrhic War entered the Roman imagination.

With regards to the Pyrrhic War there are two major ancient historical traditions: the Roman and the Greek. The Greek tradition is the older, based on materials from the third century including the memoirs of Pyrrhus himself. But for the Greeks the war that took place in Italy and Sicily was little more than a digression in Pyrrhus' audacious career. Instead they focused on his involvement in the conflicts of Greece and Macedonia in the aftermath of Alexander the Great's death. It is the Roman tradition that focuses almost entirely on what became known as the Pyrrhic War, marking it as a pivotal moment when Rome became a great power in the Mediterranean. Attempts to evaluate the sources for the war in the tradition of *Quellenforschung* have met with little success, hampered by their often fragmentary nature.¹¹

The Greek tradition forms the basis for most of what is known about Pyrrhus himself. Pyrrhus led a rather spectacular life as a cousin of Alexander, interacting with many of the great men of the time in various political intrigues and generally proving troublesome in his ambitions to those around him. He was a notable character in an era of chaos that produced some of the most captivating individuals in Greek history. For the Greeks, Pyrrhus was also a tragic character. For all of his determination, he failed to accomplish anything lasting in his various projects, fascinating writers soon after his death. Pyrrhus, despite his genealogy and the portents of his youth, never lived up to his potential due to his own choices.¹²

It was Hieronymus of Cardia, author of a history of the wars after Alexander's death composed in the mid-third century BCE, who did much to establish the foundations for later characterizations of Pyrrhus and was a major source for Plutarch.¹³ In addition to first-

hand testimony, he made use of Pyrrhus' (now lost) memoirs.¹⁴ Hieronymus was strongly in favor of the Antigonids, who established a dynasty in Macedonia, and was generally hostile to Pyrrhus, who was often in conflict with Antigonus Gonatas. He portrayed Pyrrhus as an ambitious man who was never satisfied with what he had and so always strived for more, an embodiment of hubris. Those Greeks who came after, historians, poets, playwrights, and moralists, built upon this tragic flaw in their own works. But although the Greeks were quite taken with the story of Pyrrhus, his exploits in Italy and Sicily were largely secondary to events in Greece. Only Sicilian Greek historians such as Timaeus and Diodorus spent much time on Pyrrhus' western exploits, portraying his efforts in the tradition of Greeks versus barbarians (Carthaginians in this instance). Timaeus' history is lost, but served as a source for Diodorus' own account of Sicilian history including Pyrrhus' campaign.

While some non-literary material also survives (primarily numismatic), it is the Roman literary tradition that is the basis for our knowledge of the Pyrrhic War. Roman writers made use of Greek works on Pyrrhus to various degrees, but the narrative of the conflict is very much a Roman creation that was not beholden to the Greek tradition. The Pyrrhic War was a significant episode for the historians of the Republican period, but little of this material survives directly. It would be Ennius, writing at the dawn of the second century, who fundamentally shaped the Roman conception of Pyrrhus and the war. He treated the Pyrrhic War in depth within his larger *Annals*, encompassing all of book six.¹⁵ Most importantly, he seems to be a foundational source in the mostly positive image of Pyrrhus in the Roman tradition.¹⁶ This characterization shaped subsequent interpretations of the king and in turn the war. Pyrrhus was the main antagonist, but he was not the villain. The subsequent annalists of the first century elaborated upon the war in great detail. It is from these sources that some of the more spectacular elements of the narrative stem, such as, but not limited to, the fixation on Pyrrhus' elephants, the *devotio* of Decius, and the attempt by Pyrrhus' doctor to poison him. What literary evidence survives down to the present day is often fragmentary and comes from the late first century BCE, some 250 years after the Pyrrhic War, and later.

Only Plutarch's *Life of Pyrrhus*, written in the early second century CE, survives intact, but he was more concerned with exploring Pyrrhus' character and personality than the minutiae of historical reality. Plutarch tends to smooth out the complexities of his topics, leaving out what he considers unimportant details that are not easily integrated into his interpretations.¹⁷ Within the *Pyrrhus*, he made use of Greek materials, but these are mostly employed to discuss events in

Greece or expound upon Pyrrhus' personality rather than dealing with his western campaigns. Despite these shortcomings, Plutarch's narrative as the only complete one, serves as an invaluable outline of events that puts the rest of the scattered source materials in context.

The relevant sections from the histories of Livy, Pompeius-Trogus, and Dio Cassius survive mostly in abbreviated and often confused epitomes (the *Periochae*, Justin, and Zonaras respectively). Livy's work also formed the basis of the imperial era Livian tradition (e.g. Orosius, Florus, Eutropius, Eusebius, *De Viris Illustribus*), which was of variable quality but helps to preserve some of Livy's ideas. Pompeius Trogus, via Justin, likely relied primarily on annalistic sources for the war.¹⁸ The Pyrrhic War was also mined for scattered tidbits by the compilers Valerius Maximus and Frontinus. In addition, significant fragments survive from the Late Republican era writer Dionysius as well as the imperial era writers Appian and Dio Cassius, all preserved thanks to Byzantine extracts.

What survives to the present concerning the Pyrrhic War is a fragmentary collection of works three or four steps and centuries removed from the events they purport to describe. While major events like the negotiations or the battles are relatively well represented in the fragments, more mundane or minor events that occurred are often lost. As such, what survives are those major elements that were focused upon and thus 'enhanced' by Roman writers, overshadowing the reality of what they purport to describe.

Modern consideration of the Pyrrhic War and its eponymous participant has been shaped by Pierre Lévêque's *Pyrrhos*, published in 1957. Pyrrhus had certainly been an object of focus long before, but within broader works such as the Greek and Roman histories of Mommsen, Beloch, de Sanctis, and others. Lévêque's study was remarkable in its expansive approach to Pyrrhus, incorporating a wide range of materials and approaches within a cohesive whole. He considered Pyrrhus within the context of his age and sought to establish a historically grounded biography of the king. Lévêque's Pyrrhus is a man of unending ambition and impressive martial skill like his cousin Alexander, but inhibited by a more challenging set of foes (the Diadochi and Romans) that precluded any lasting accomplishments. No other biographical study has challenged Lévêque's as the definitive work on Pyrrhus.¹⁹ There are two major issues with Lévêque's *Pyrrhos*. The first is his tendency to focus on the great men of the ancient world, which dominated historical scholarship before the cultural turn. While a major driving force in the Pyrrhic War, there were many geopolitical factors at work within Italy and Sicily irrespective of the king. At the same time, the focus on Pyrrhus is a reflection of the Roman understanding of the war as a

kind of duel between two antagonists rather than a multipolar regional conflict. The second issue is that Lévêque's focus is on the character of Pyrrhus. To be sure the war that would bear his name is a major element of the work, but it is framed in a way that is meant to shed light on the king akin to Plutarch. Lévêque was, after all, writing a biography of the king, not a history of the war.

Many aspects of the Pyrrhic War have been greatly expounded upon since Lévêque's *Pyrrhos*, adding greater nuance to the subject.²⁰ In the last few decades, scholars have added to our knowledge of numismatics, epigraphy, and archaeology. New methodologies and approaches to literary sources have greatly expanded the questions being asked and the information we can garner from a dimly lit moment in time. Perhaps most importantly has been the work done exploring the nuances of interaction among the peoples of Italy, Sicily, and the wider Mediterranean. As such, it is possible to place the Pyrrhic War to an unprecedented degree within the geopolitical context of Italy and Sicily in the early third century.

The purpose of this study is to shift the focus from Pyrrhus as an individual and approach the war that bears his name through a broader lens, evaluating events in the context of the period. The war was not a duel between the Romans and Pyrrhus; it was a multipolar conflict that grew out of prior events in Italy and Sicily. Beyond Pyrrhus and Rome, the war must be approached with consideration of the Tarentines, Syracusans, and other western Greeks, the Samnites, Lucanians, and the peoples of Italy, as well as the Carthaginians and others. Each of these groups played their own distinctive role shaped by their own distinct objectives and considerations. The Pyrrhic War played a significant role in shaping the history of Rome and was, in turn, reshaped into a pivotal moment by later Roman historians who saw this as the burgeoning of their Mediterranean empire.

The community of Rome

Early Roman history is defined by the dynamic of individuals seeking personal glory within the greater collective community, which appears in the narrative of the Pyrrhic War as well. Although reproduced in multiple contexts, it is the story of Cincinnatus that best encapsulates this ideal. In 458, L. Quinctius Cincinnatus was approached by a group of senators, hailed as dictator, and asked to save Rome from an enemy that had already defeated the Romans in battle.²¹ Cincinnatus was at that moment personally working his farm, which Livy says amounted to only four *iugera*. His modest position, even though a patrician by birth, is a central tenet of every retelling of the story. Dionysius has him lament that his duties as dictator will affect his

harvest and express a fear that his family would go hungry. Regardless of the burdens, Cincinnatus did not hesitate to take up the dictatorship and through his efforts rescue the Roman people from their enemies. Having accomplished the task set before him, Cincinnatus then laid down his power 16 days after he was appointed even though he was entitled to hold the most powerful position in the Republic for six months. Dionysius says that he turned down all offers of land, wealth, slaves, and gifts from both a grateful state and his personal friends, preferring to return to his humble farm. The tale of Cincinnatus' dictatorship glorifies the ideals of community before self, honor before wealth, and modesty before selfish personal gain that later authors saw as lacking in the waning days of the Republic. He rejects *ambitio* in favor of *concordia*.²²

The ideals represented by Cincinnatus and others of the early Republic are woven into the narrative of the Pyrrhic War. The Roman dialogue with their past meant that the past and present simultaneously shaped one another, reinforcing present idealistic virtues with past exempla and vice versa. It is not any individual Roman that defeats Pyrrhus, but the community as a whole. Every individual had a vital role to play, even down to the lowest soldiers. Pyrrhus is said to have remarked that he could conquer the world with an army of Romans, while Cincias described the Senate as a council of kings.²³

Individually, it is Fabricius and Decius Mus who embody the same ideas as Cincinnatus. C. Fabricius Luscinus was consul in 282 and 278, and P. Decius Mus in 279. Fabricius also served as an envoy to Pyrrhus. Dionysius in particular presents Fabricius as an echo of Cincinnatus, describing him as a man of humble wealth who prided himself on his public service.²⁴ All citizens, Fabricius says in a speech to the king, had equal opportunities for honor within the community. What distinguishes Romans, he says, was their competition in duty rather than wealth. He thus ranks his standing in society by his magistracies without any shame in his relative poverty. It is this virtuousness that allows Fabricius to deny Pyrrhus' offer of wealth and power in exchange for his assistance in the negotiations. So too this is a denial of the corrupting influence of luxury, recalling the complaints of Cato the Elder from the second century as he denigrated the negative impact of Greek culture in undermining traditional Roman values. Whereas Pyrrhus placed great store in his personal desires, it is the virtuous denial of personal *ambitio* by the leading men of Rome that would allow them to overcome their enemies in the end.

Decius, for his part, quite literally devotes his life to the community of Rome. When commanding at the battle of Ausculum, he performed a ritual in which he dedicated himself and the enemy soldiers to the

chthonic deities in exchange for victory. Not only does he serve as an exemplar for later generations (who could not agree on whether or not he died), but he also is depicted as a continuation of tradition as his actions are linked (erroneously) with similar sacrifices by earlier Decii. The story also replicates the self-sacrifice of C. Mucius Scaevola, who, facing execution for his failed assassination attempt of Lars Porsena, burned off his own hand in a nearby brazier. In the words of one eminent philosopher, 'the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few' and here death was to be embraced for the good of all. No individual Roman was indispensable. In fact, the Roman concept that members of the same family shared the same traits meant that everyone was, fundamentally, replaceable. Decius Mus, consul and general, could die in battle but the community would continue, whereas their opponent, Pyrrhus, was unique. His death would effectively end the war, which made the attempt to kill him by Obolus particularly riveting. This Roman characteristic allowed them to absorb horrific losses in their wars with the Samnites, Pyrrhus, and Hannibal, only to come out victorious.

The stories attached to Fabricius and Decius Mus are of dedication and sacrifice of the individual addressed to the present through the voice of the past. Such tales, like that of Cincinnatus, reinforce the idealistic preeminence of the Roman community, which for later writers was the ultimate reason for Roman victory over Pyrrhus and many other enemies. Such characteristics were seen as lacking in the Late Republic as individuals like the Gracchi, Marius, Caesar, and others put their own personal interests first. It is impossible to imagine Cincinnatus or Fabricius choosing to march on Rome with an army of fellow citizens regardless of cause. At no point in the Pyrrhic War do any Romans succumb to the promise of personal gain at the cost of their fellow citizens. Fabricius rejects Pyrrhus' offers, as do his fellow senators who were likewise offered magnificent gifts by Cineas during his diplomatic mission to Rome. Instead, the Romans stood together against all odds.

There are many individual Romans that make appearances in the narrative of the Pyrrhic War, but none of them appear as fleshed-out individuals. They each appear relatively briefly to fill narrative or ideological purposes. In part, this representation is a reflection of the fragmentary survival of sources. Beyond Plutarch's *Life of Pyrrhus*, the conflict is a series of disjointed and often contradictory vignettes that give little space for character development. Aside from Pyrrhus, ancient writers portray the actors through 'character viewpoints', an external perspective that tends to be evaluative based on a moral assessment, rather than 'personality viewpoints', which provides a more sympathetic engagement from the point of view of the

individual without explicit judgment.²⁵ The two schemes are not mutually exclusive, as Plutarch mixes both in his *Life*.

The Romans of the Pyrrhic War are not individualized characters, but avatars for the community. They embody the largely mythical ideals of society imposed by later generations. Their individual personalities are defined by their actions and conformity to the ideal rather than a point of view perspective that lets the reader into their head. This is a stark contrast to Plutarch's Pyrrhus (no doubt drawn from the Greek tradition), who stands out in the narrative as a recognizable and complex individual. We get a glimpse into Pyrrhus' head as Cineas questions his plans. The king becomes troubled when his advisor points out the futility of conquest in realizing his stated end goal of relaxing in symposia. The Roman characters are held up as exempla who are both imitating their own past as well as being held up as models and critiques for later generations. The thoughts and feelings of men like Fabricius are left unexplored and unimportant. His persona is defined by his actions.

The communal strength of Roman values is defined by distinctions from other peoples. The Romans tended to stereotype others by defining characteristics that often contrasted with their own 'superior' values.²⁶ Even fewer individual characters appear among the Italian peoples, Carthaginians, and western Greeks that crop up in the narrative. These peoples are distinguished by their communal features, as defined by the Romans, rather than as well-defined individuals.

With regards to the Italians, there is little distinction paid to the Romans versus their allies. Only a few exceptions to this general rule exist, which serve to enhance the image of Rome. At the battle of Ausculum, the allied Italians are individually listed by Dionysius in the line of battle, creating a catalogue of Roman power. In another instance, when a detachment of soldiers made up primarily of Campanians terrorized a city they were supposed to be garrisoning (Rhegium), a clear distinction is made in the way their actions violated Roman ideals.²⁷ Even though they were a unit of Roman allies, they are clearly identified as non-Roman in terms of ethnicity and behavior. Indeed, this group of Oscans shares more in common with their Samnite cousins. The Samnites were long-standing Roman opponents but appear in the narrative of the Pyrrhic War as disreputable and largely inconsequential. Their moral failings when compared to the Romans are the reason why they had lost the preceding Samnite Wars and had been forced to turn to Pyrrhus for help. Those Campanians in Rhegium shared these characteristics and thus bolster the virtuous image of Rome, which is further reinforced by the eventual harsh punishment of the garrison.

Roman virtues are likewise showcased through the debauchery of the western Greeks in the later descriptions of events. In particular, it was the people of Taras who receive the worst characterizations, a view shared by Greeks as well as Romans who saw the city as a place of licentiousness, decadence, and instability.²⁸ The city had seen a great deal of commercial success and enjoyed the fruits of its wealth, which is contrasted with the ideals of Roman austerity and serves as commentary on the effects of empire on the Late Republic.²⁹ Polybius says that it was Tarentine pride in their own achievements that ultimately led to them calling for Pyrrhus' help, and fits into his own wariness towards democracies.³⁰ Indeed, when Pyrrhus arrived, the Tarentines balked at the discipline he enforced for their own good. The foolish actions of the Tarentines, from attacking the Romans unprovoked to mocking every slip of the subsequent Roman envoy's Greek speech, are consistently linked with their democratic government, which was given to impulsiveness unlike the measured decisions of the Roman Senate. (Rome's assemblies make no appearances.) Where the Romans acted calmly and methodically, Taras was inherently chaotic and perverse.

In a similar fashion, the Carthaginians are consistently stereotyped as duplicitous and conniving.³¹ The admiral Mago was sent to offer aid to the Romans, but also made diplomatic overtures to Pyrrhus, their enemy, attempting to play both sides. Indeed, the Carthaginians tried to bribe Pyrrhus to go back to Italy and fight the Romans instead of continuing his attacks on them in spite of their treaty with Rome. The Tarentines may have mocked the supposed barbarousness of the Romans, but it is the Carthaginians who are the real barbarians according to the Roman narrative. The Punic faith of the Carthaginians undermines any agreement they make and they cannot be trusted. The reader is left anxious when they appear, aware of the Carthaginian attempts to backstab the Romans who are dealing with them in good faith. Their betrayal, constantly on the horizon, never comes, but not through a lack of trying. Treachery is inevitable and that Carthaginian duplicitousness would play out fully in the Punic Wars that followed only a short time later. The Carthaginians in the Pyrrhic War may have been fighting Pyrrhus like the Romans, but they are not portrayed as really being on the same side and certainly not as allies.

The Pyrrhic War stands as a supposed first major interaction of the Romans and Greeks beyond Italy. Of course, the two peoples had long been in contact both directly and indirectly by the early third century. But here the two are depicted as entering into a war largely ignorant of one another, which creates a tragedy in which the Greeks (or at least those Greeks with characteristics the Romans can admire) and

Romans fight unnecessarily. The relationship of the two peoples is complicated by the political reality of Roman imperialism and contemporary importance of Greek culture at the time when the surviving sources were written. For Dionysius, the Romans were Greek. In his history, Rome was founded as a Greek city in Italy and the Pyrrhic War is the point at which that heritage comes full circle with ‘modern’ Romans and Greeks rediscovering one another. As such, Pyrrhus’ recognition of Roman values is recognition of Roman Greekness.³² For Plutarch, writing during the Second Sophistic, the Romans were neither Greek nor barbarian, inhabiting a unique liminal space between the two.³³ Pyrrhus’ time in the west is an argument that the Greeks were better off under the Romans than the despotic Hellenistic monarchs, as well as a manifestation of the cultural imperialism of the later Greeks within the Roman empire.³⁴

Pyrrhus as Alexander

In Plutarch’s *Life of Pyrrhus*, the king sat down with his trusted advisor Cineas to discuss his upcoming expedition to the west. While the conversation is far from historical, serving to demonstrate Pyrrhus’ hubris, it encapsulates how his campaign was depicted in the Roman tradition. The immediate target of the campaign is assumed to be Rome itself before Cineas even begins speaking. From there he asks, “It is said, O Pyrrhus, that the Romans are skilled at war and rule many warlike peoples; if the gods permit us to conquer these men, how are we to make use of the victory?”³⁵ Pyrrhus responds saying that the answer was obvious, all of Italy would quickly fall as well. And after that? “Sicily is near at hand.”³⁶ And then? “Who then could keep away from Libya and Carthage when the city happens to be so attainable ...?”³⁷ After all of this is over, Pyrrhus says, he and Cineas can enjoy themselves in good wine and discussion. When Cineas pointed out that they could have wine and talk now, Pyrrhus was troubled but nonetheless remained committed to his plans. Pyrrhus’ campaign goals were nothing short of rivalling in the west the deeds of his cousin Alexander the Great in the east, and the linchpin to the entire endeavor was Rome. This characterization underlies the Roman tradition as well as modern analysis. Lévêque says that the king “dreamed of a grand Greek Empire of the west” and pursued this goal in a planned-out manner similar to his cousin.³⁸ More critically, Lefkowitz has suggested that “the whole history of his campaigns indicates that [Pyrrhus] acted on impulse rather than on any consistent policy.”³⁹ But this characterization too is one that reflects a disorganized interpretation of Alexander’s campaign. Alexander’s shadow weighs heavily on Pyrrhus’ activities in Italy and Sicily.

In terms of martial skill and character, Pyrrhus is portrayed as a man near his famous cousin. Plutarch says that Pyrrhus elicited a great deal of respect among his contemporaries with many comparisons to Alexander. Antigonus, he and Dionysius say, described Pyrrhus as the greatest general of his generation, followed by Hannibal and then himself.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, when describing an apocryphal meeting between Scipio and Hannibal in Ephesus, Plutarch and Livy have the Carthaginian rank Pyrrhus among all generals as second only to Alexander (followed by himself in third).⁴¹ Appian follows suit, but specifies that both Pyrrhus and Alexander shared the quality of being greatly daring (μεγαλότολμος).⁴² It is this risk-taking and striving for the spectacular backed up with innate skill that allowed Alexander to conquer much of the known world and Pyrrhus to dream of the same. That daring nature also came with drawbacks. Pyrrhus' identity, like those of Achilles and Alexander, was rooted in his martial skill; in the political arena he often came up short.⁴³ So too, in Plutarch's *Moralia*, Pyrrhus' two sons are said to have asked him which of them would inherit his kingdom. Pyrrhus responds, "To whichever of you has the sharpest dagger," paralleling Alexander's own deathbed answer to a similar question by his generals.⁴⁴ While apocryphal, their imagined answers ensured violence in the succession and potential destruction of everything they had gained, suggesting a lack of foresight and long-term planning on their part. Even when Pyrrhus' character is assigned negative attributes, such as his despotic actions in Syracuse and looting of the temple in Locris, it is along the same model of Alexander, the good king gone bad.

Pyrrhus was certainly a skilled general, but he does not quite come off so well in the Greek tradition as in the Roman.⁴⁵ Hieronymus' now-lost account appears more balanced in this regard with Pyrrhus both winning successes and suffering defeats against Lysimachus, Demetrius, and Antigonus. Pyrrhus becomes an agent of hubris-fueled chaos against the order imposed by the future Antigonid dynasty that would rule Macedonia. Pyrrhus played the role of disruptive antagonist in Hieronymus' narrative, skilled at war but far from unmatched among his contemporaries. He would repeatedly fail to forge a lasting political legacy, sowing only disorder in Macedonia and Greece. Later Greek writers would fill out Pyrrhus' personality beyond the outline of Hieronymus, but ironically none would do so as favorably as his Roman rivals. Certainly, no Greek sources offered a ranking of generals like the Roman historians. The Romans forged Pyrrhus into a figure of renown, using Alexander as a framework.

For the Romans, Alexander was a man to be revered for his deeds. Caesar was said to have wept when comparing his own early career achievements with those of Alexander. Pompey obtained Alexander's

cloak on his own grand tour/conquest of the eastern Mediterranean. And Septimius Severus closed Alexander's tomb to ensure that no one after him would see the great king's preserved body. Most of the surviving histories of Alexander come from the Roman era, and here he became the embodiment of a Roman hero. He achieved unparalleled military glory, often personally fought in battle, and unified diverse peoples under a vast empire. Even as he was admired, historians like Q. Curtius Rufus used him as a vehicle to criticize the excesses of the worst Roman emperors. Ultimate power corrupted Alexander, who killed his friends, ruled the Greeks and Macedonians imperiously, and named himself a god. In the Roman historical tradition, Alexander serves as an exemplary lesson, often good but sometimes bad.

At times, Roman writers enjoyed some more imaginary flights of fancy with regards to the Macedonian king. Livy tackles the burning question of who would win in a fight, Alexander or the Romans, in a digression within his narrative of the Second Samnite War.⁴⁶ Not only was Roman virtue superior and Roman soldiers more capable than the Macedonians, he argues, but there were many very capable Romans like Q. Fabius Rullianus and L. Papirius Cursor compared to the singular skill of Alexander. It would be a difficult fight against him, but in the end the Romans would come out ahead and Alexander would be forced to retreat. This 'what if' scenario foreshadows Pyrrhus' own supposed attempts to conquer Rome, his failure to overcome the resiliency of the Roman people, and his eventual withdrawal. In both cases the Roman community would prove superior to the singular conqueror. But the Romans, despite their boasts, would never have the opportunity to defeat Alexander. They could insist that he had intended to attack them next after he had returned from India, but his death ended any such possibilities.⁴⁷

Ap. Claudius Caecus, in his famous speech before the Roman Senate when they were on the verge of accepting Pyrrhus' peace offer, uses Alexander as a major part of his argument.⁴⁸ He berates his fellow senators for even considering such a shameful action, asking how they could surrender to Pyrrhus, who had himself been defeated by Alexander's lieutenant Lysimachus, when they boasted that their fathers would have sent the Macedonian king himself running had he come to Italy. Claudius' rhetoric takes a different approach given his immediate situation. Rather than building up Pyrrhus as a masterful general, he attempts to inspire his fellow Romans by denigrating the king. Nevertheless, it is Alexander who serves as the model.

By the time the annalists wrote their histories in the first century, the Romans had beaten the Etruscans, the Samnites, the Carthaginians, the Hellenistic kingdoms, and dozens of others in

battle, but the greatest general of all time remained beyond their reach. They would defeat another commander of renown in the form of Hannibal, but he, like all Carthaginians in Roman eyes, was a despicable man, cruel and perfidious. Alexander was a (mostly) admirable man to be emulated. Thanks to Pyrrhus' position on the edge of Roman historical memory, his reputation, goals, and achievements were malleable enough that he was transformed into a second Alexander, one that the Romans could and would defeat.

While Pyrrhus served as the main antagonist of the war, it was the Tarentines who were the true villains. (The Carthaginians too are always lurking evilly in the shadows.) Pyrrhus is, ultimately, a misguided figure who expresses regret about fighting the Romans at all. Agency for the conflict is shifted from Pyrrhus to the Tarentines. It was their arrogance that initiated violence, depravity that demanded a Roman response, degeneracy that undermined their ability to fight on their own, cowardice that led them to call for help from Pyrrhus, and deceptiveness that tricked him into accepting. It is Pyrrhus' later recognition of Tarentine faults that spurs him to seek peace according to some Roman sources, as well as contributing to his decision to shift his efforts to Sicily. Pyrrhus proves his superiority and elicits sympathy when he attempts to enforce martial discipline in the midst of Tarentine debauchery.

Building up Pyrrhus as a great conqueror also introduced a fundamental conflict among Roman writers in the Late Republic versus imperial eras. As Lévêque noted, "once Rome was master of the entire Mediterranean Basin, one could no longer imagine that she had been so severely threatened that she had to defend her very existence against Pyrrhos," which led to a less sympathetic image over time.⁴⁹ For example, early in the first century BCE Valerius Antius described the battle of Ausculum as a victory for Pyrrhus, reinforcing the dire threat he represented, creating tension for the reader, and emphasizing Roman virtues through their eventual victory. But the epitomizers of Livy and Dio Cassius insist that Ausculum and sometimes Heraclea were Roman victories. It was absurd that a king from a backwater like Epirus, no matter his skill, could defeat the might of Rome. It is these same later sources, especially Dio/Zonaras, which place greater emphasis on Pyrrhus' negative attributes. Dio says that Pyrrhus' reputation was indeed highly touted by everyone, but that it was inflated beyond its reality.⁵⁰ Pyrrhus and his eponymous war remained flexible enough that they could continue to be modified to fit the narratives of Roman writers as needed. He still represented a serious threat, but not quite so severe as earlier generations insisted.

Regardless, for later Roman writers it was almost inconceivable that Pyrrhus, as the great general he was built up to be, would not want to

conquer Rome. Why else would he possibly have come to Italy if not to fight the greatest city on the peninsula, a city on the verge of greatness? Inflation of Pyrrhus' goals served to strengthen his comparison to Alexander and transform the war into one of survival for the Romans. The war became an epic contest between two honorable adversaries, tragically forced into their roles. Ennius made the Pyrrhic War into a kind of miniature epic within his larger work. Other characters, Tarentines, Samnites, and Carthaginians, fall into supporting positions in the narrative. In the end, the Romans got their war against an Alexander, if not *the* Alexander, against whom they could prove themselves superior. Through victory, they took up Alexander's mantle as successors to his accomplishments. Where Pyrrhus failed to live up to the deeds of his cousin, the Romans would succeed.

Italy and beyond

By late 280, Pyrrhus had defeated the Romans in battle at Heraclea and briefly invaded Latium, coming within sight of Rome itself. Inspired by Ap. Claudius' speech to reject an offer of peace from the king, a reply by the Senate was sent to Pyrrhus that the Romans were willing to discuss peace but first he must "leave Italy."⁵¹ In the Roman narrative of the war, Italy is characterized as Roman space into which Pyrrhus was an outside invader. Italy was rightfully subordinate to their will. Polybius says that the Pyrrhic War was the first time the Romans treated Italy not as a foreign land but as theirs by right.⁵² In the aftermath, he continues, they made real their claim to control of the peninsula.

The war itself in Roman eyes was the result of Tarentine denial of Roman claims to the entirety of Italy. In 282 a Roman fleet sailed into what the Tarentines claimed as territorial waters that were guaranteed by treaty. Later Roman writers either denied this treaty or diminished its relevance, but either way portray the Roman expedition as within their rights. The people of Taras were angered by what they saw as Roman intrusions in areas of Magna Graecia they saw as within their own sphere of influence. The Tarentines then compound their folly by inviting an outsider, Pyrrhus, into the peninsula. The Pyrrhic War has been shaped into the culmination of Rome's inevitable rise to Italian hegemony. Dionysius himself made it the climax of his history, ending it as the Romans took control of the peninsula and were on the verge of stepping out into the wider Mediterranean.

Dionysius demonstrates the pan-Italian nature of Roman power in his description of the Roman forces at the battle of Ausculum. Alongside the four legions of Romans were "the Latins, Campanians,

Sabines, Umbrians, Volscians, Marrucini, Paeligni, Ferentani, and their other subjects.”⁵³ This is a demonstration of the expansive nature of Roman power, which Dionysius reinforces by referring to these peoples as subjects, which can be seen in other descriptions of Rome’s armies. A similar, albeit more Homeric, description of Roman control of Italy is found in the *Punica* of Silius Italicus where, at the battle of Cannae, he catalogues the Italians in the Roman army.⁵⁴ Polybius too uses a catalogue of Italian peoples gathering for war in 225 to contrast Italian unity (and numbers) with the invading Hannibal.⁵⁵ The listing of Roman allies in all three instances is an expression of power and space. But while the army at Ausculum was expansive in nature, it did not encompass the entire peninsula. Samnites, Lucanians, Bruttians, and Italiote Greeks fought alongside Pyrrhus, which Dionysius also highlights. This array of peoples on the other side of the battlefield calls to mind the coalition of peoples that fought the Romans at the battle of Sentinum. The Pyrrhic War thus becomes a final effort at resisting Roman expansion that the reader knows is ultimately doomed to failure as Italy submits to their rightful Roman masters. The armies arrayed at Ausculum can be divided into two categories: Roman subjects and soon-to-be subjects.

But the idea of Italy as Roman space is an anachronism of later generations that slowly developed over the course of the third century and became a significant ideological factor for Roman writers at the end of the second. At the turn of the third century the Roman alliance system only firmly encompassed central Italy, including Latium, Campania, the Abruzzi region, and portions of Apulia, which Dionysius includes in his list of peoples at Ausculum. Etruria and the areas inhabited by the Gauls in the north as well as Samnium and the rest of southern Italy remained either independent or only periodically subject to Rome. Livy attempted to place these areas under Roman hegemony by right of conquest through his use of language, referring to conflicts of the late fourth century as revolts and rebellions. Similarly, the antiquarian Varro retrojected the idea of Roman Italy, perhaps unintentionally, when he describes a map of Italy that he says was located in a temple of Tellus built by the consul P. Sempronius Sophus sometime after battling the Picentes in 268. However, this *picta Italia* is used by Varro as a vehicle for his own discussion of Italian agriculture based on a road system that was not in existence in the mid-third century and was likely modified during restoration work in the first century.⁵⁶ The idea of Italy as a distinct and cohesive unit was a product of Roman conquest, not a precursor to it.⁵⁷

The reality of Roman control of Italy was realized by the middle of the third century, but it would take time for the ideological perception of the peninsula as a geographically defined space to develop.

Peninsular Italy had been closely tied to the surrounding regions, economically and culturally, for centuries. Most relevant in the context of the Pyrrhic War were the close ties of southern Italy to the wider Greek world. Various Syracusan leaders even created an empire of sorts that spanned Sicily and southern Italy. While later Romans pointed towards strict legal definitions of Italy as Roman space prior to the wars with Carthage, it is notable that after Sicily was seized in the First Punic War it took time for extra-Italian regions to be transformed into subordinate provinces. It was only at the dawn of the second century that a relatively regular system of provincial administration was developed, which would see the empire divided into provinces on the one hand and Italy on the other.⁵⁸ As the Romans forged an idea of empire in the mid to late third century, the concept of Italy as something separate developed in conjunction. Provincialization was one of the factors that gave rise to the conception of a geographically and ideologically discrete Roman Italy. This distinction would itself fuel the grievances among the peoples of Italy that led to the Social War and eventual Romanization of Italy that so heavily weighed on the writers of the first century.

The Second Punic War at the end of the third century, in which Hannibal waged a brutal campaign in the peninsula, also played a significant role in defining Italy as Roman space. The Romans had controlled all of Italy since the mid-260s, reinforcing their dominion by founding Latin colonies throughout the peninsula. Hannibal's campaign in Italy pushed the Romans to the brink of destruction, which was further exacerbated by the subsequent decision of the Samnites and other southern Italian peoples to support the Carthaginian. Roman strength was built on their Italian alliance network, which Hannibal set about undermining. The peoples of Italy were necessary not only for the expansion and maintenance of Rome's empire, but its very survival. The violation of Italy by Hannibal helped to crystalize the developing idea of its geographic distinctiveness, which was projected backwards into the Pyrrhic War alongside a denigration of the Carthaginians in general.

Although unhistorical, the idea of Roman Italy heavily influenced the perception of the Pyrrhic War for later generations. Italy would in time become a geographically and ideologically distinct Roman space, but that was not true in the early third century. Pyrrhus was the first major extra-Italian opponent that the Romans faced, but that title is a misnomer as Italy was closely tied to the wider Mediterranean world. By emphasizing the idea of Roman Italy, later writers buttressed the false narrative of the war as a virtuous Rome versus the Alexanderesque Pyrrhus. It was, in fact, a multipolar conflict in which the Romans were merely one of many communities interacting within a

Notes

- 1 ... σὲ δὲ παρατηρεῖ καὶ τέτακεν ἐπὶ σοὶ τὸ νοῦν, DH 19.12.2.
- 2 Assmann (2011) 34–36.
- 3 DH 1.72–73.
- 4 Livy *pr.* 1–3.
- 5 Corbier (2009) 227–228; Barnes (2005) 18–19.
- 6 Richardson (2012).
- 7 See [Chapter 3](#).
- 8 Oakley (1997–2005) 1:76–78.
- 9 The general idea of a basic foundation of the historical narrative and possibility of ‘plausible reconstruction’ is followed by Oakley (1997–2005) 1:76–78, 100–102; Pelling (1990); and Wiseman (1987) 257–259. A much more critical approach is taken by Barnes (2005); Salmon (1967); and Beloch (1926). For an overview of memory in the study of Rome, see Galinsky in Galinsky (2016) 1–35.
- 10 The *Ineditum Vaticanum* (FGrH 839) may derive from Timaeus, Humm (2007).
- 11 The most significant example of this approach regarding Pyrrhus is Rudolf Schubert’s *Geschichte des Pyrrhus* (1894), although he at times makes assertions that push the boundaries of his sources (a not uncommon problem of *Quellenforschung*). See Momigliano (1966) 107; Miles (1995) 1–5.
- 12 Mossman (2005) 499.
- 13 Lévêque (1957) 22–26; Pearson (1987) 256.
- 14 Lévêque (1957) 20–22; Schubert (1894) 1–4. Jacoby (1923) 2c:653, asserts that the memoirs were fabricated, which is unlikely, Bengtson (1950) 367.
- 15 For an in-depth discussion of the book, see Skutsch (1985) 328–366.
- 16 Lévêque (1957) 46.
- 17 Pelling (1990) 175, who makes the point within the context of Plutarch’s comprehension and portrayal of internal Roman politics.
- 18 Lévêque (1957) 60.
- 19 Nenci’s *Pyrrho* (1953) focused on exploring Pyrrhus’ political interactions with the other great men of the early Hellenistic east rather than the minutiae of his activities, arguing that he was little more than a pawn. Garoufalas’ *Pyrrhus* (original Greek publication in 1946 and republished in English in 1979 with few changes) presents a fawning narrative that, while extensively footnoted, fails to approach the subject with any real criticalness given the difficult nature of the sources. The more recent *Pyrrhus of Epirus* by Champion (2009) is an uncritical retelling of the ancient sources that rarely incorporates scholarly discussions and is aimed at a popular audience.
- 20 For an in-depth bibliography of the expansive works on Pyrrhus, the Pyrrhic War, and related topics, see Lafon and Pittia (2009).
- 21 Livy 3.26–29; DH 10.23–25; *MRR* 1:39.
- 22 Vasaly (2015) 85–86.
- 23 Pyrrhus: Dio fr. 40.19; Zon. 8.3; Eutrop. 2.12. Cineas: Plut. *Pyrr.* 19.5; Justin 18.2.10–11; App. *Samn.* 10.3.
- 24 DH 19.13–18; see [Chapter 4](#).
- 25 Levene (2010) 173–175, who considers Livy in a broader context of his entire work, thus affording a look at characters who sometimes act in internally inconsistent ways, which is difficult in the fragmented nature of Pyrrhic War sources.

- 26 Pfeilschifter (2000).
- 27 See [Chapter 6](#). Later in the Second Punic War when Capua joined Hannibal, the Campanians are labeled as ‘luxury-loving and arrogant’ despite their familial ties to the Romans, Levene (2010) 216 n. 129. But in the Pyrrhic War, they remained loyal and do not elicit similar criticism in the surviving sources.
- 28 Buszard (2005); Barnes (2005) 26–28; Lomas (1993) 14; Wuilleumier (1939) 99–100; Peirano (2010) 43–44. Taras in the Roman historical tradition, Livy 9.14, Strabo 6.3.4; Polyaeus *Strat.* 4.2.1. Plato (*Lg.* 1.637b) refers to drunken festivals like the ones that appear in the Pyrrhic War.
- 29 Athenaeus (12.522) links Tarentine moral decline with their prosperity.
- 30 Plb. 8.24.1; Walbank (1957–1971) 2:101.
- 31 In general, see Levene (2010) 214–260. The Roman concept builds upon earlier Greek models, Prandi (1979). The stereotype became more pronounced over time as the Carthaginians faded as a distinct people, Waldherr (2000).
- 32 Peirano (2010) 44–45.
- 33 Swain (1996) 350–352.
- 34 Schepens (2000) 416; Mossman (2005) 503–504.
- 35 “πολεμιστοὶ μὲν, ὧ Πύρρε, Ῥωμαῖα λέγονται καὶ πολλῶν ἔθνων μαχίμων ἄρχοντες· εἰ δὲ δοῖν θεὸς περιγενέσθαι τῶν ἀνδρῶν, τί χρῆσόμεθα τῇ νίκῃ”; Plut. *Pyrr.* 14.2.
- 36 “ἡ Σικελία χεῖρας ὀρέγει ...” Plut. *Pyrr.* 14.4.
- 37 “τίς γὰρ ἂν ἀπόσχοιτο Λιβύης καὶ Καρχηδόνης ἐν ἐφικτῷ γενομένης ...” Plut. *Pyrr.* 14.5.
- 38 *Pyrrhos revait d’un grand empire grec du Couchant*, Lévêque (1957) 284.
- 39 Lefkowitz (1959) 163.
- 40 Plut. *Pyrr.* 8.1–2; DH 20.10.1. Such characterizations may go back to Greek sources used by Plutarch, Schettino (2009) 176.
- 41 Plut. *Flam.* 21.3–4; Livy 35.14.8.
- 42 App. *Syr.* 10.
- 43 Mossman (1992).
- 44 ‘ὅς ἂν ὑμῶν ὀξυτέραν ἔχη τὴν μάχαιραν.’ Plut. *Regum* 37. Compare Alexander’s legendary statement, Arr. *An.* 7.26.3; Curt. 10.5.5. Arrian (*An.* 7.25; cf. Plut. *Alex.* 76) says that the royal journals indicated that he had lost his voice before dying, implying that such a statement is fabrication.
- 45 Lévêque (1957) 22–43.
- 46 Livy 9.17–19; cf. Plut. *Mor.* 326A–C. The digression also served to highlight Roman resiliency after their defeat at the Caudine Forks and to praise the virtues of the men of that age as equals to Alexander in their own right, Oakley (1997–2005) 3:196–197.
- 47 Humm in Caire and Pittia, eds. (2006) 175–196 defends the idea that Alexander was to some degree planning a western campaign aimed at a defense of Hellenism from barbarians, but suggests its target would have mainly been Carthage rather than Rome.
- 48 Plut. *Pyrr.* 19; Zon. 8.4; App. *Samn.* 10.2.
- 49 *une fois Rome maîtresse de tout le bassin de la Méditerranée, on ne pouvait plus imaginer qu’elle eût été menacée de si près et qu’elle eût dû défendre son existence même contre Pyrrhos*, Lévêque (1957) 50.
- 50 Dio fr. 40.3.
- 51 ἐξεληθόντα τῆς Ἰταλίας, Plut. *Pyrr.* 19.3.
- 52 Plb. 1.6.6; cf. 2.20.10; Florus 1.13.1.
- 53 Λατίνους δὲ καὶ Καμπανούς καὶ Σαβίνους καὶ Ὀμβρικούς καὶ Οὐολούσκους καὶ Μαρουγίνους καὶ Πελίγνους καὶ Φερεντανούς καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ὑπηκόους ... DH 20.1.4–5.

- 54 Sil. *Pun.* 8.356–616.
- 55 Plb. 2.23–24; Walbank (1957–1971) 1:196–203.
- 56 Var. *Rust.* 1.2.1; Roth (2007).
- 57 *contra* Humm (2009), who sees the idea of Roman Italy in the late fourth century developing along ethno-linguistic lines rather than geographically.
- 58 There was no regular process of provincial administration when these areas were conquered. It was only in 198, decades after Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia, and the Spains were under Roman control, that a more regular system of six praetors was created, Livy 32.27.6; Brennan (2000) 1:163–173; Richardson (1986) 76. Appian (*Sic.* fr. 2.2) says that praetors were only sent to Sicily as governors in 241. Judicial functions likewise took time to develop as can be seen in Greece, Kallet-Marx (1995) 161–183.

2 Conflict and competition before Pyrrhus

The moment that ancient sources focus on as the beginning of the Pyrrhic War was in 282 BCE when a Roman fleet of about a dozen ships sailed along the southern Italian coast. There, it was spied by the drunken populace of Taras who embarked their own navy and attacked, capturing all but five ships and killing one of the fleet's two commanders. The Roman crews were mistreated and the captured ships sunk. The Tarentines furthered their folly by mocking the clothes and speech of Roman envoys who arrived to demand redress. One drunken fellow, Philonides, even went so far as to urinate on the Romans' togas, which elicited more laughter from the assembled Tarentines. Furious, the head of the Roman mission, one L. Postumius Megellus, threatened that the filth on his toga would be washed out with Tarentine blood. Realizing the severity of the threat, the Tarentines resolved to ask Pyrrhus, the king of Epirus, to come to their aid. As such, the blame for the war was placed clearly on the collective head of the Tarentines, who, through their own foolishness, orchestrated a conflict between the Romans and Pyrrhus.

The story is quite riveting. Honor, betrayal, drunkenness, and righteous fury; it has it all. The narrative emphasizes the virtuousness of the Romans and the thoughtlessness of the Tarentines, but does not fully convey the wider geopolitical context of what was happening. The attack on the Roman fleet certainly played a large part in the outbreak of war between Rome and Taras, but there were long-standing tensions already between the two cities rooted in the expansion of Roman power on the peninsula over the previous decades. Italy had long been embroiled in endemic warfare that often involved peoples from beyond the peninsula, especially from Sicily in the early third century. In the early third century, the Romans pursued an aggressive diplomatic campaign among the Greeks and Italian peoples of the southern peninsula to capitalize on their divisions even as they deployed armies. The outbreak of the Pyrrhic War, which would in time extend far beyond Italy, was not as straightforward an event as our sources suggest. The Pyrrhic War was an outgrowth of many prior conflicts in both Italy and Sicily.

Affairs in Sicily

While the Pyrrhic War would be waged initially in Italy, affairs in Sicily played a major role in its outbreak. Before (and after) the Pyrrhic War, Sicily was a land divided. The western portion of the island was under Carthaginian control (*epikrateia*), while the east was divided into a series of independent Greek *poleis*. In between were smaller Sikel communities that made alliances or war as circumstances dictated. Adding another element of chaos were Italian mercenaries such as the Mamertines, who had seized control of several cities for themselves. The wars on Sicily rarely resulted in long-lasting changes to the overall political situation. For short periods though, large portions of the island's communities were unified under one side or the other. Only a couple of decades before the Pyrrhic War, Agathocles led the city of Syracuse to dominate not only much Sicily but also significant portions of southern Italy, serving as a model of the interconnectedness of the two regions.

At the center of Greek affairs in Sicily was the city of Syracuse, which saw success in influencing or dominating its neighbors in the fourth century under the leadership of the tyrannical Dionysii and Timoleon. The Syracusans would rise again under the leadership of the sometimes adventurer, tyrant, and king Agathocles (r. 316–289).¹ Agathocles was an embodiment of the complexity of Sicilian affairs. He was born around 361 in Thermae, a Greek city then within the Carthaginian *epikrateia*. His father was Greek from the Italian city of Rhegium and his mother was Sikel. After the family moved to Syracuse, the young Agathocles served in the army during Timoleon's rule and worked his way up the ranks. More lofty ambitions would see Agathocles exiled twice. He became a *condotierre* in Italy and Sicily before seizing power in Syracuse in 316 from the oligarchs that controlled it. He proceeded to unite much of Greek Sicily and made war against the Carthaginians, even briefly invading Africa in 310. After the ignominious end of those efforts, campaigns in Italy followed around 300 in an attempt to bring the Italiote Greeks under his control and subdue the Italian peoples attacking them (Bruttians and Lucanians). Beyond these areas, Agathocles established diplomatic relations across the Mediterranean aimed especially at the Greek/Macedonian leaders of the east, which included marrying his daughter first to Pyrrhus of Epirus and then Demetrius Poliorcetes. He died at the age of 72 of natural causes, having led a spectacular and controversial life. On his deathbed he restored the democracy of Syracuse, ushering in a period of political division and turmoil.

Agathocles ruled Syracuse through a combination of generosity to his supporters and brutality towards his enemies. It was through

popular support of the lower classes and mercenaries that Agathocles was able to maintain his power early in his reign and maintain it for decades. In particular he played upon the long-standing conflicts between lower- and upper-class Syracusans. Agathocles' most committed opponents were oligarchic exiles driven from the city who urged other Greek cities and the Carthaginians to fight him. Agathocles responded with repeated purges of his oligarchic enemies and seizure of property, supposedly killing some 4,000 when he first seized power.² Dissatisfaction with Agathocles' rule cropped up from time to time due to his harshness, sometimes resulting in severity against his base of supporters as well as his traditional enemies. Agathocles may have died of natural causes, but that does not mean that he was beloved. His domestic policies ensured he remained in power for a long time, but it did little to create a positive image. Upon his death, the Syracusans, led by factions hostile to him, cleansed the city of his statues and damned his memory.

Agathocles faced a difficult situation in how to actually rule over his Sicilian domains given their politically divided nature. When his power was at its height, extending over most of the island, his authority was based on replacing hostile local leadership with those more friendly ones (usually democrats) and military strength. As in Syracuse, brutality was a tool he was ready to wield. When the people of Segesta were unwilling to meet his financial exactions, Agathocles proceeded to execute the male population while selling the women and children into slavery.³ It was only after the effective collapse of his authority beyond Syracuse in 305, after the war with Carthage had ended, that he named himself king. He did so without any qualifiers or distinctions. Ideologically he placed himself on a similar level to the Diadochi and without inherent limitations on the extent of his authority, but it was a claim of bravado as his actual power was more or less limited to Syracuse itself.⁴ But his authority in the city was supreme, as evidenced by his coinage which bears the inscriptions 'of Agathocles' and later 'of King Agathocles'. He was not really king of Sicily regardless of his own ambitions. Agathocles adapted his means of control abroad as the political reality shifted, but at the heart of his authority was the support of the Syracusan populace.

The Carthaginians maintained control of the western portions of Sicily through a combination of military and diplomatic efforts, although precise details are poorly preserved.⁵ It was Syracuse who posed the most enduring antagonist for Carthage on the island, and Agathocles' expansionistic actions were a direct threat. Carthaginian efforts during most of Agathocles' reign were led by Hamilcar son of Gisco, who proved adept at navigating the political complexities of the island and exploiting Greek infighting. He followed the precedents set

by his predecessor, also named Hamilcar, who had involved himself in the internal affairs of Syracuse. Hamilcar son of Gisco created a friendly relationship with political exiles from Syracuse, which gave him an avenue by which to influence the internal politics of the city, captured several towns in central Sicily, and moved to besiege Syracuse. He spread word in the city that Agathocles had been defeated and offered terms of surrender, setting off a panic.⁶ In the end Hamilcar son of Gisco was unsuccessful in subduing Syracuse, but he followed a pattern of active participation in the internal politics of the city by previous commanders.⁷ The Carthaginians followed up this effort by supporting a coalition of Greek cities centered on Acragas in opposition of Agathocles and Syracuse.

Hamilcar son of Gisco's efforts were successful in greatly weakening the position of Syracuse by taking advantage of Greek disunity. Hostilities in Sicily (and Italy) were not limited to the battlefield. These communities were interwoven in a complex political, social, and economic network that created avenues of contact that could be exploited to further strategic goals. The Carthaginians proved time and again to be very familiar with Greek political and social divisions, which they eagerly exploited through the diplomatic, mercantile, and personal relationships of individuals. While Carthage would be unable to fully subdue Syracuse, her generals managed to blunt the efforts of men like Agathocles while waiting for opportunities to turn the tide in their own favor. Carthaginian leadership often proved patient in waiting for the breakdown of occasional Greek cooperation. Against Agathocles, their strategies proved effective. Exhausted, both the Carthaginians and Agathocles were more than happy to renegotiate peace in 306 that reestablished the pre-war status quo. Peace allowed Agathocles to focus on his Greek rivals, but the damage had been done. The Sicilian Greek cities were sapped of their strength and would remain at odds, unable to effectively interfere in the Carthaginian *epikrateia* for the time being.

Nevertheless, Agathocles continued to dream of a renewed war against Carthage, reaching out to the Greeks of the east while extending his hegemony into Italy.⁸ The Sicilian Greeks were weakened by the prolonged warfare of the last decade, but the Greeks of Italy were not. Sicily and Italy were closely linked together, and the success of Dionysius I in extending Syracusan influence on the peninsula was a model for Agathocles' goals.⁹ Agathocles had knowledge of the situation in Italy, having spent his first banishment from Syracuse. At that time, he had attempted to overthrow the government of Croton and briefly served the Tarentines as a mercenary. In 300, he campaigned against the Bruttians and brought some of the Italiote Greeks under his control, stepping in as a defender

of Hellenism in the face of barbarian attack. In 295 he treacherously seized the city of Croton, and established alliances with the Italian Iapygians and Peucetians. Coinage from Italiote Greek cities suggests that his influence, at least indirectly, encompassed Lucania as far as Velia and Metapontum, as well as perhaps Locri. The Tarentines apparently managed to remain independent, but their dreams of greater hegemony were limited in the face of Syracusan power. Syracuse's presence would end with the death of Agathocles in 289.

Other peoples likewise traversed both Italy and Sicily. Agathocles' interests in Italy also invited Carthaginian interventions on the peninsula. The Carthaginians were involved in several economic and diplomatic affairs in Magna Graecia down to the time of Pyrrhus in response to Syracuse.¹⁰ Italian mercenaries, mostly Oscan but also Etruscan, served in the armies of both Carthage and Syracuse.¹¹ Roman merchants were ensured their rights to trade in Sicily through treaties with Carthage. While Italy was seen as a distinct geographic, ethnic, and political region under the Roman empire, that was not true before the Punic Wars. Peoples and goods flowed between Sicily and Italy, while those with ambitions of power stretched out their hands to unite the Greeks on either side of the Strait of Messina.

Affairs in Italy

As in Sicily, there were enduring conflicts in Italy that contributed to the eventual arrival of Pyrrhus. The Romans and Samnites had been fighting for much of the previous 60 years, and around 283 they began to fight again. The reasons for war are to be found ultimately in the hostility among some Italian peoples towards growing Roman influence and power. Since 343, the Romans had expanded their influence from Latium to all of central Italy with numerous incursions beyond that. The key to their success was the creation of a dynamic alliance network that put the military resources of other communities under Roman control. Superior manpower reserves allowed Roman armies to absorb significant losses in the brutal style of Italian warfare and continue to field new forces. Expansion also brought greater economic prosperity to Rome, including the first issue of coinage in the late fourth into the early third centuries.¹² This monetary development is an indication of the economic ties between Rome and Campania alongside the growing scale of the outlays of the Roman government for soldiers and public works. The Republic may not have been as sophisticated as the Hellenistic kingdoms, but it boasted a strong organizational system both internally and externally that allowed it to aggressively pursue its interests at home and abroad.

Military alliances were not unique to the Romans. Attempts by the

Samnites, Etruscans, and other Italian peoples to pool their resources against the Roman advance would see their climax in the Third Samnite War (298–290) at the battle of Sentinum.¹³ The peoples of central Italy were arrayed on either side of the battlefield. In the end, the Romans and their allies came out victorious. While Roman armies marched across much of the peninsula by the end of the fourth century, real control was still limited in the northern and southern regions despite the anachronistic claims of later Roman historians. By the mid-280s when fighting picked up again, there is no indication of cooperation between those Italians fighting the Romans in the north and the south.¹⁴ The Romans had divided their enemies, forcing them to fight independently against Rome's superior collective resources. Resistance by the Samnites and others was increasingly difficult to maintain in the bloody, drawn-out wars of Italy.

Fighting also broke out in northern Italy, although the exact course of events is unclear. In 284, the Senones and/or Boii, tribes of Gauls, entered Etruria and besieged the city of Arretium in alliance with other Etruscans. In the past, various tribes of Gauls had fought against the Etruscans as well as allied with them against the Romans.¹⁵ The Roman army sent to relieve Arretium suffered a devastating defeat.¹⁶ Fragments from Appian's history describe a more convoluted tale.¹⁷ He asserts that the Romans dispatched a diplomatic mission to complain about mercenaries, as he called them, being sent by the Gallic Senones to help certain Etruscans. The leader of the Senones, Britomaris, had the ambassadors butchered, claiming that the Romans had done the same to his own father. This cruelty led to a Roman army cutting a swath of destruction through the land of the Senones. Here Appian presents a fantastic tale that fails to inspire any confidence in its accuracy, but nevertheless reflects an interesting dichotomy in who is to blame. Of course the immediate cause of the war is the impious actions of killing the Roman envoys by the Senones, which justifies Roman actions as a *bellum iustum*. (Other sources also mention this murder, as well as linking the Senones to the sack of Rome a century prior.) But Appian also offers a justification for the killing by having Britomaris (and not Appian himself) assert that the Romans had done something similar in the past war. The Romans are still fully right in their response, but they are not completely innocent.

Here we see through a window, however hazy, into the convoluted nature of Italian warfare of the time. Romans, Etruscans, and Gauls had been fighting against and alongside one another for a very long time. Renewed fighting is hardly surprising. At the same time, the importance of military alliances is clear, as Arretium faced a coalition of other Etruscans and Gauls. Few communities stood much of a

chance of survival without help, and in this case the Etruscans of Arretium relied on the Romans. Alliances could be dangerous too, as the Gauls, whether they killed Roman ambassadors or not, were attacked due to their Etruscan alliances.

The Romans fought the allied Etruscans and Gauls over the next several years. In 283 the Romans won a victory over a combined army of Etruscans and Gauls at Lake Vadimon before moving against the Gauls along the Adriatic coast.¹⁸ The Romans seized the land for themselves, calling it the *ager Gallicus*. Polybius says the Gallic Boii continued the war into 281, but soon after made peace. Meanwhile, triumphs are recorded over the Etruscans in the *fasti triumphales* in 282 and 281.¹⁹ Throughout the wars in the north the Romans normally sent only a single consul (except in 283) as they were also campaigning in the south at the same time.

The Romans faced a diverse group of opponents in southern Italy. Roman aggression was opposed by their traditional enemies, the Samnites, as well the Lucanians, and Bruttians. Although significant political developments were creating systems of organization and cooperation among the peoples of the southern Apennines, they were not unified polities despite their portrayal as such by Greek and Roman writers. Fighting began around the Greek city of Thurii, with which the Romans had concluded an alliance in 286/285 after driving off a Lucanian attack.²⁰ As with other western Greeks, the Thurians found it expedient to acquire outside assistance in the face of local problems, in this case raids by Lucanians from the surrounding mountains. Fighting broke out again in 282 when a force of Samnites, Lucanians, and Bruttians laid siege to Thurii. This attack indicates a recovery to some degree by the Samnites since their last war with the Romans ended some ten years prior. By pooling their resources, these Italian peoples could hope to accomplish what none could manage individually. In this case, eliminating a Roman ally to their south, which threatened encirclement of their homelands, and looting a relatively wealthy city.

Southern Italy was tied together in a complex web of political, military, social, and economic relationships.²¹ In Samnium, Lucania, Apulia, and Messapia settlement patterns began to change from small, isolated communities into more substantial settlements. In the plains, this took the form of urban settlements of substantial size with distinct oligarchic classes and a sense of community binding them together.²² Many Italian communities of the south began minting their own coins in the late fourth century, indicating the growing importance of trade.²³ These communities were, for the most part, oriented towards Magna Graecia and were heavily influenced by Greek culture in the Hellenistic period. Warfare was still common between communities,

but strong cultural and economic bonds existed simultaneously. Unfortunately, literary sources add little to archaeological evidence for these interactions, which tend to mention the peoples of Italy only when they interacted with the Romans.

In 282, the consul C. Fabricius Luscinus led his army south and earned a triumph over the Samnites, Lucanians, and Bruttians.²⁴ He had come in response to help the Roman ally Thurii. Given Roman penetration of the southern Apennines in previous wars, it is safe to surmise that as part of his campaign Fabricius marched deep into the mountains Samnium and Lucania and caused significant damage that resulted in his recognition. Much active campaigning in Bruttium seems unlikely due to the distances involved and time constraints. A lack of effective resistance from the Italic peoples of the south allowed one of the consuls in 281 to be reassigned to fight the Tarentines when war with them broke out that same year. By this point in time the Samnites were simply unable to stand on their own against the armies of Rome, even in defense of their homeland. Roman expansion into central Italy, which was physically manifesting through colonization, had cut off Rome's northern and southern enemies from each other. The Samnites could look to their southern Italian neighbors for help, but Lucanian and Bruttian assistance was clearly insufficient as Fabricius had demonstrated. If the Samnites wished to enhance their military forces with outside support, they would have to look elsewhere for more effective allies.

Rome and Taras

The Italian peoples were not the only ones to oppose Roman expansion. Despite the focus of later writers to emphasize the Tarentine attack on a Roman fleet and subsequent insults to their ambassadors, the conflict between the Romans and Tarentines went far deeper than mere drunken impulse. At times the Greeks of Taras had taken steps to disrupt Roman efforts, although not through direct military confrontation. The Tarentines had encouraged active resistance among other peoples against the Romans in Lucania and southern Campania.²⁵ Roman armies were marching further and further south with each successive war, encroaching on areas the Tarentines considered within their own sphere of influence. The alliance with Thurii and the fighting around the city had brought the Romans into Magna Graecia. For the Tarentines, who saw themselves as the rightful leaders of the Italian Greeks, Roman intrusion was a serious threat.

The relative power between the Italiote Greeks and the peoples of Italy had shifted away from the Greeks. Italian peoples had increased

their raids into Greek territory, including the Lucanian attacks on Thurii. Agathocles' recent death had removed a potential source of outside support for Thurii, leaving it vulnerable. Unable to defend themselves without assistance, the Thurians had resolved to call for outside aid. Appian mentions a pro-Roman faction in the city, which would have been opposed by a similar pro-Tarentine one.²⁶ The political machinations at Neapolis in 326 and subsequently in Taras suggest that the population would have been split between approaching the Romans or their fellow Greeks (the Tarentines) for help.²⁷ Many western Greek cities had sought outside assistance for external and internal problems they were unable to solve. The Thurians resolved to reach out to Rome for help.²⁸ The Romans responded positively, driving off the Lucanians in 285 and 282. For Thurii, a Roman alliance was a logical choice. The Romans had already proven capable of campaigning effectively in southern Italy against the Samnites and Lucanians in the Third Samnite War. At the same time, relations between Thurii and Taras were mired by war and Tarentine interference in local politics.²⁹ In addition, the Tarentines did not offer the same military capability as the Romans. The Romans could provide support and protection from both the Lucanians as well as the Tarentines. As such, Thurii admitted a Roman garrison to aid in their defense, giving the Romans an ally and base of operations on the southern Italian coast for the first time.

For the Romans, an alliance with Thurii offered significant benefits. First and foremost was the simple expansion of the alliance system, which augmented their strength indirectly with the wealth of the Greek city, while keeping those resources out of Lucanian hands. In immediate terms though, Thurii's position on the far side of Samnium and Lucania further encircled those regions. A string of colonies in central Italy had already secured a land route to Apulia, from which Samnium and Lucania could be invaded from the east. A friendly position at Thurii created the possibility of actions from the south. The Romans may also have aimed at weakening Taras' position in Magna Graecia after the power vacuum left by Agathocles' death. Such a tactic would have seemed particularly tempting given the hostility the Tarentines had shown over the last several decades to Roman expansion.

For the Tarentines, the alliance between the Romans and Thurians was an insult, calling on aid from a non-Greek, as well as a threat with the increased involvement of Rome in the affairs of the south. The Tarentines had long coveted leadership of the Italian Greeks through the often ineffective Italiote League.³⁰ Syracusan involvement in Bruttium had been a limiting factor for the Tarentines, but the death of Agathocles had created a regional vacuum of power that they

looked to fill. But Roman encroachment was ever threatening. Only a few years prior, they had established the colony of Venusia in Apulia about 80 miles northwest of Taras.³¹ A Roman garrison in Thurii put an immediate roadblock in the way of any plans towards the east, and threatened further Roman interference. The successful defense of Thurii ensured a continuing Roman presence in the region, much to Tarentine dismay.

It was in 282, shortly after the Lucanian siege of Thurii had been broken by Fabricius, that the Tarentines attacked the Roman fleet. The story of the attack and its consequences, as relayed by Roman sources, are truly spectacular. Three major episodes dominate: the successful Tarentine attack on the Roman fleet, the Roman embassy that resulted in war, and the subsequent debate among the Tarentines about what to do.³² The Tarentines as a whole are depicted as drunk at nearly every point and given to rash decisions without forethought, a stark contrast to the calm response of the Roman ambassadors to even the gravest insults. Tarentine arrogance is poignantly described when they are said to mock the Roman diplomat Postumius' accent while speaking Greek. Dio goes further still, asserting that the Tarentines had been plotting with Etruscans, Umbrians, and Gauls even before the attack on the fleet in a similar conspiracy theory as presented by Orosius with regards to the Samnites.³³ Blame for the war is squarely placed on the shoulders of the foolish Tarentines. Roman aggression is relegated to mere background.

However, Appian's narrative of these events offers a slight variation. As he had done with Britomaris during the affair with the Gauls, Appian offers a somewhat more nuanced portrayal. He has the Tarentine politician named Philocharis remind his fellow Tarentines of an ancient treaty that forbade the Romans from sailing beyond the Lacinian Promontory near Croton, south of Thurii. Unfortunately, this treaty is only mentioned by Appian, who is far from a reliable source, and he places it in the voice of Philocharis rather than himself.

In terms of Appian's reliability here, it would be odd for later Romans to invent a treaty that undercuts their own justification for war. The unique reference to this treaty would suggest that it fell out of the main historical tradition rather than it being invented by Appian. A similar debate existed among ancient writers with regards to the so-called Philinus treaty between the Romans and Carthaginians that designated relative spheres of influence, which was seen as proof of Roman blame for the Punic Wars. But Appian is here relying on a variant historical tradition, much as he would when discussing the first round of negotiations with Pyrrhus after the battle of Heraclea. In Appian's narrative of the attack on the fleet, the Romans are still right, but, as with the Gauls before, they are not completely innocent.

Appian is referring to a real treaty between Rome and Taras, which the Romans violated in 282. This treaty was likely made between 332 and 330, probably in conjunction with the agreement the Romans made with Alexander the Molossian who had been campaigning on behalf of the Tarentines at that time.³⁴ Limitations on Roman fleet movements were perhaps restricted by this treaty in Tarentine territorial waters, which the Tarentines defined as extending to the Lacinian Promontory.

While the Romans likely violated an agreement with the Tarentines, at the very least in Tarentine eyes, their actions were not aimed directly at the city. The Romans had commissioned a modest fleet in 311 as part of their expanding interests in more distant regions.³⁵ The central place the attack on the fleet has been assigned in the Roman narrative means that the details of what actually happened are all but lost. Certainly the role of Tarentine drunken impulse should be rejected as later invention. The fleet must have been present in conjunction with the Roman defense of Thurii.³⁶ The city lay on the far side of the mountains of Lucania, making logistical support by land difficult; the fleet would greatly ease these concerns. Having accomplished his goal of relieving the city, Fabricius would have withdrawn his men northwards back across Lucania.

With the Roman consul gone, the Tarentines acted, not in a drunken haze but in a coordinated effort to remove the Romans from Magna Graecia. They attacked the Roman fleet, probably near Thurii rather than within sight of Taras itself. Several ships were sunk and a number of them captured with their crews. The Tarentines then moved against Thurii, sacking it and expelling its Roman garrison. Pro-Roman leaders were sent into exile, replaced, no doubt, by those in favor of a Tarentine alliance.³⁷ The apparent speed with which Thurii fell, especially when they were able to fend off multiple Lucanian attacks until help arrived, suggests that the Tarentines relied on local sympathizers to open the gates.

Despite the characterization of Tarentine motivations as particularly irrational by the pro-Roman narrative, their attack was aimed at a real threat to the goal of regional hegemony. Blame, such as it is, was on both sides. It was the Romans who were expanding their alliances into Magna Graecia and had violated their treaty with Taras. By belittling Tarentine actions as decided in a fit of drunken impulsiveness, pro-Roman sources constructed a narrative that simultaneously denigrated the Tarentines, emphasized Roman morality, and justified their military response. The Tarentines, on the other hand, coveted the leadership of the Italiote Greeks, which they did not actually have, and acted to prevent Roman usurpation of their perceived right to hegemony. Instead of the complex geopolitical conflict between two

ambitious cities, this episode becomes a farce that ultimately resulted in the Tarentines' deceptive invitation for Pyrrhus to come to Italy, an action the Romans claim he would come to regret. The story is simplified and gripping, eliminating the nuance of what was happening in Italy at the time. The political and military interactions of the peoples of Italy were interwoven in a convoluted web into which Pyrrhus would step.

Roman diplomatic and political warfare

The Tarentine attack on the Roman fleet and Thurii must have been late in the year, precluding any Roman military response in 282. Instead, they dispatched envoys led by L. Postumius Megellus to the south, nominally seeking a diplomatic solution to their row with Taras in early 281. The Roman demands were straightforward: the return of Roman prisoners, those individuals exiled from Thurii be allowed to return, the return of any property that had been seized from Thurii, and the surrender of those who had orchestrated these 'crimes'.³⁸ The return of Roman prisoners was a relatively small matter, but restitution in Thurii and the surrender of Tarentine citizens were very unrealistic. These demands were part of fœtal procedures to declare war (*rerum repetitio*), which were often extreme with little expectation of acceptance.³⁹ Refusal on the part of the Tarentines created a religious justification on the part of the Romans, which would have been confirmed by the *fœtiales*.

The Tarentines are depicted as drunkenly insulting the Roman ambassadors, mocking their dress and accents, and brashly welcoming war. While this description makes for good theater, the Tarentines hardly needed to be inebriated to refuse the Roman demands as unreasonable. The Romans wanted the capitulation of a city that saw itself as the rightful hegemon of the Italiote Greeks. Further, their concerns about Roman expansion southward were still relevant. In addition, they could reasonably expect aid from the Samnites and nearby peoples in some form. No doubt some sort of debate took place, which may very well have led to mutual insults and hurt pride. But this fantastic scene is a later Roman construction with seemingly little basis in reality; it is justification for war that highlights Tarentine debauchery in comparison to Roman civility.⁴⁰ Whatever the specific details, the Tarentines refused the Roman demands, resulting in war.

The Roman response aimed at an end to the war through a combination of military power and political pressure. With the diplomatic mission still underway, the senate in early 281 had decided to assign the consuls to pursue the ongoing wars against the Etruscans and Samnites respectively. Upon Postumius' return though, the Roman

people, we are told, were incensed and demanded immediate action against the Tarentines. There was supposedly some attempt to dissuade the impulse of the masses until after the current spate of wars was concluded, but the anger of the people was too much.⁴¹ The Senate here acts as a force of considered moderation in contrast to the people, whose counterparts dominated Taras. Throughout the war, the Senate is depicted as always acting in the best interest of the Republic through wise leadership. The nuance of internal Roman politics is almost completely lost in the surviving narrative. The consul L. Aemilius Barbula was ordered to suspend his campaign in Samnium and move south against Taras. Some sources claim Aemilius avenged the insult given to the ambassadors by ravaging Tarentine territory. As Aemilius' army entered the territory of Taras, there would no doubt have been some depredations to demonstrate the seriousness of Rome's intentions. However, he also quickly made the exact same demands as Postumius without any additions. It is the Tarentine response to Aemilius' demands that provides a somewhat better view into the political struggles within the city and the diplomatic efforts of the Romans.

With a Roman army on their doorstep, the people of Taras are said to have realized their own danger. They debated whether to accept the proposal of Aemilius or to seek a foreign general to wage the war as they had done in the past. The obvious choice was Pyrrhus of Epirus. Should they pursue war, the Tarentines could count on some assistance from the Samnites, Lucanians, and Bruttians due to their own current wars with the Romans, as well as the Messapians.⁴² However, this support was deemed insufficient, either due to Roman successes in 281 or the lack of unified leadership. Among the calls for war, Plutarch says that some of the wiser older citizens opposed inviting Pyrrhus.⁴³ Among these was Meton, who failed to carry his point and slipped out of the meeting. When the day of the assembly came to decide the matter formally, he entered while singing and accompanied by flute girls, apparently drunk.⁴⁴ The Tarentines called for him to dance and enjoyed the spectacle. But once he had their attention, Meton dropped his act and warned his fellow citizens that should they decide on war by inviting Pyrrhus to lead, they would soon find it impossible to enjoy such frivolity with a garrison of foreign soldiers amongst them. The character of Meton foreshadows the inadvisability of war. His speech garnered some support, but not enough. The pro-war party bundled him out of the assembly.

The debate whether or not to invite Pyrrhus suggests that there was some internal disagreement in Taras about the matter, even though it is shaped to fit into the larger negative characterization of the Tarentines. The Romans had a dim view of democratic unruliness.

This negative characterization of the Tarentine democracy fits the general Roman model. Unlike the leadership of the Senate in Rome, in Taras the hot-headed elements overwhelmed those like Meton that held wiser opinions. Similar character flaws would later lead the Tarentines to likewise join Hannibal, another 'foreign' invader of Italy. While exaggerated by the Roman annalists, the political divisions are consistent with other communities at the time. Factional strife had been an important factor in the debates in Thurii when they had reached out to the Romans rather than their fellow Greeks. There were pro-Roman individuals in Taras, as seen in subsequent events. Faced with direct Roman action, the Tarentines could hardly stand alone against a direct Roman attack. Appian summarizes the pro-war position by equating submission to Roman demands as surrender, but also pointing out that outside help was needed as it had been by other western Greeks before.⁴⁵

Meton and those that thought like him urged a reasonable cautiousness with regards to the aggressive and powerful Romans, standing in for the reader who knows the end of the story. Direct war was a departure for the Tarentines in their opposition to Rome, which had instead focused on indirectly acting through others. Rome was a dangerous opponent. In the end, the faction that urged war won out. The Tarentines were unwilling to back down, which would have only invited future Roman demands making the city a *de facto* subordinate to barbarians and ending any dreams of hegemony. Thus the pro-Roman faction's protestations are preserved in the narrative as tragic figures. Meton becomes Cassandra, able to see the reality of the situation but unable to convince anyone to listen. As such, an invitation was extended to Pyrrhus to come to the aid of Taras. The full military support of the city was promised, as well as 370,000 Italian infantry and cavalry as a further lure.⁴⁶

It was not long before the Romans knew of the Tarentine decision. What impact news of Pyrrhus had is unknown, but the Romans continued to pursue a campaign of pressure on Taras through a combination of political, diplomatic, and military action. Aemilius immediately ramped up his campaign, devastating the countryside and seizing local strongholds. But this was not a simple campaign of destruction. Aemilius freed the most influential Tarentines that he captured in his attacks, who, we are told, returned to Taras impressed with his kindness and promoted a peaceful resolution.⁴⁷ This strategy was aimed at strengthening the faction that urged reconciliation and bringing about a ceasefire. At the very least it would sow political discord in the city. The Romans had pursued a similar strategy at Neapolis, expanding their local contacts in an attempt to promote friendly factions.

At the same time Aemilius began to peel away Taras' Greek allies, isolating the city. It was around this time that Locri, Croton, and Rhegium joined the Romans. The Romans had already proven capable of asserting their military power in the region, coming to the aid of Thurii and now attacking Taras. Rome was a powerful ally in the face of renewed Tarentine aggression. Locri and Croton, like Thurii, had resisted Tarentine hegemony for decades. All three cities had been within the Syracusan sphere of influence and they now feared Tarentine interference. A Roman alliance offered protection. The Romans, on the other hand, took advantage of the regional vacuum of power left by Agathocles to extend their alliance network and further inhibit the growth of the rival power of Taras. The Roman alliance with Thurii had inserted the Romans in Italiote Greek affairs and added fuel to the existing conflict with the Tarentines, which in turn created further opportunities for expansion that the Romans were quick to seize.

This multipronged attack caused the Tarentines to second-guess their decision to reject Roman demands for restitution over events at Thurii. The captured men that Aemilius had released agitated for peace, no doubt alongside men like Meton, and secured the selection of a pro-Roman leader named Agis as head of state (*strategos autokrater*).⁴⁸ Agis was a friend of the Romans already, although the exact nature of this relationship is not detailed. The expectation was clearly that Agis would pursue peace talks with Aemilius and secure an end to the fighting before more serious damage was done. Of course, the invitation to Pyrrhus had already been sent. It would be a mistake to label this a simple fluctuation as a result of the changing whims of a democracy as the Romans would. These events were a reaction to the effort by Aemilius to put maximum pressure on Taras through a variety of means in the hopes of forcing an end to the conflict in their own favor.

The campaign by Aemilius demonstrates a great deal of sophistication. The Romans did not rely on pure aggression, but mixed military and diplomatic efforts. While Postumius' mission had little chance at success, it justified further Roman action. Aemilius acted in a way that would both strengthen Rome's regional influence and put diplomatic pressure on Taras. His military operations were a supplement to these efforts. The Romans were not simple conquerors who defaulted automatically to all-out war. They had constructed an expansive alliance system through a clever combination of warfare and diplomacy, which was on display here. Aemilius could hope to return to Rome having secured Roman domination of Magna Graecia and perhaps even peace with Taras.

However, Aemilius' plans collapsed late in 281. The potential for

peace under the leadership of Agis ended with the arrival of Pyrrhus' men in Taras. Late in 281 Pyrrhus' lieutenants Cineas and Milo arrived with several thousand troops.⁴⁹ The pro-war faction now seized the leadership of the city, with the support of Pyrrhus' men, and removed Agis. Pyrrhus' troops then occupied the citadel. Aemilius decided to withdraw from southern Italy as the campaigning season was coming to a close. The Tarentines, emboldened by their ally, laid an ambush for the Romans in a narrow pass, but ceased their attacks when the Romans used their remaining Tarentine captives as human shields.⁵⁰ Unwilling to see his gains reversed, Aemilius wintered in the colony of Venusia, only a few days' march from Taras.⁵¹ Early the next year, Pyrrhus himself arrived and the war would take on a much larger dimension. The Romans now faced an unknown entity in the form of the Epirote king, while still facing enemies across the length of Italy.

King Pyrrhus of Epirus

The Greek world had been greatly expanded by the campaign of Alexander the Great (r. 336–323), and the aftermath of his death saw rampant war and political chaos throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. In an environment of powerful Hellenistic kingdoms, the region of Epirus was largely inconsequential. Epirus was a small area of northwest Greece that played only a peripheral role in the events of the Classical Age, and was only marginally more relevant in the Hellenistic. One of the more significant parts was when the royal family of Macedonia had intermarried with that of Epirus. Olympias, wife of Philip II and mother of Alexander the Great, was from Epirus. The region was organized as a confederation of tribes including the Molossians, Chaonians, and Thesprotians. This political arrangement was perhaps encouraged by Antipater in order to act as a limiter on the potential growth of power of the Molossians in the aftermath of Alexander's death, but the system was not so well organized as to be called a league or kingdom.⁵² The king of the Molossians, who made up the most powerful tribe, served as the military leader of the combined forces of the confederation and as such was able to exercise significant, but not limitless, power. Alexander the Molossian (r. 350–331) was able to use these combined resources to campaign in Italy on behalf of the Tarentines. But after his death, Epirus suffered decades of instability and weakness.

Pyrrhus' life before his western campaign was intimately involved in the wider conflicts of the kings of the Hellenistic world.⁵³ The Greek east remained his focus, even as he was campaigning in the west. He was a second cousin to Alexander the Great through

Olympias. Pyrrhus' youth was largely spent outside Epirus and at the mercy of foreign rulers. As an infant Pyrrhus had to be smuggled out of Epirus to be raised in the court of the Illyrian king Glaucias when his father was assassinated. In 306 he returned as a young man, only to be driven out after four years by Cassander, ruler of Macedonia. Pyrrhus then took refuge with Demetrius Poliorcetes before being sent to the Ptolemies in Egypt as a hostage. In 297, Ptolemy II Philadelphus returned Pyrrhus to his throne in Epirus, along with money and troops, as a means of weakening Cassander in Macedonia. Although he had gained a significant military reputation, Ptolemy was simply using him as an (expendable) pawn in the larger game of Hellenistic politics. Even after establishing himself in his homeland, Pyrrhus still could not escape the machinations of his more powerful neighbors.

Epirus did not have the resources to allow Pyrrhus to assert himself on the political stage of the Hellenistic world. As such, he began to seek opportunities to expand the resources at his disposal. He concluded a series of dynastic marriages, which included Lanassa, daughter of Agathocles of Syracuse. Lanassa gave birth to two sons (Alexander and Helenus), but she eventually left Pyrrhus and married Demetrius. Pyrrhus incorporated Ambracia into the Epirote alliance and established a treaty with the Acarnanian League to the south.⁵⁴ He had his eyes on bigger prizes than these remote regions of Greece, but had to compete with other generals that could match him in martial skills and were not eager to see him expanding into more strategically valuable areas. In 292 he attempted to seize Thessaly from Demetrius but was driven back. Six years later he successfully invaded Macedonia but was again driven out of his gains, this time by Lysimachus. By 286, the achievements of Pyrrhus were limited, especially when he tried to contend directly with great powers. Other opportunities had to be sought in order to realize his goals in Greece and Macedonia.

The call for help from the Tarentines in 281 had significant potential for Pyrrhus' ambitions. Greek cities spanned southern Italy and eastern Sicily, and were closely tied together through trade and political connections. Agathocles, to whom Pyrrhus was related by marriage, had united many of the Western Greeks only a decade prior. Pyrrhus' uncle, Alexander the Molossian, had already campaigned in Italy, albeit with limited success. Beyond the Greeks, the promise of hundreds of thousands of Italians that could be tapped for his own military purposes must have seemed a godsend. Italy and Sicily were rich lands that he could use to pursue his eastern ambitions.

What then of the totality of Pyrrhus' ambitions in the west? Plutarch tells us that Pyrrhus' goal was to conquer Italy, including Rome, Sicily, and then Carthaginian Africa.⁵⁵ Such a plan is spectacularly unlikely,

and the result of later exaggeration in an attempt to make Pyrrhus' campaign into an attempt to replicate in the west Alexander's conquest of the east. For later Romans, it was inconceivable that Pyrrhus could have planned anything less than the conquest of Rome. Why else come to Italy? But this is a Roman construction derived from their own perceived historical importance. Pyrrhus' invasion is framed as an impediment to Rome's inevitable rise to world dominion, making it difficult to credit such a clearly exaggerated standpoint.

The king's actions during the war speak to a more realistic and limited set of goals: to conquer the Greek areas of Italy and Sicily. At no point did Pyrrhus make a serious attempt to attack the city of Rome, and only once did he actively campaign beyond southern Italy despite repeated victories on the battlefield. Likewise he showed no inclination to cross over to Africa and attack the city of Carthage itself, as Agathocles had done. In the negotiations with the Romans that are described in the sources, Pyrrhus is consistent through them all: hegemony in southern Italy. (No doubt this would come to include Sicily as well, but any such diplomatic efforts do not survive.) War with Rome and Carthage was incidental, not the end goal. His intention was not an easy task, but certainly a reasonable one. His resources were too limited to aim at much more. How well-informed Pyrrhus was about the geopolitical realities of Italy and Sicily is unknown.

Pyrrhus followed his lieutenants Cineas and Milo with a substantial military force: 20,000 infantry, 3,000 cavalry, 2,000 archers, and 20 elephants.⁵⁶ Along with the 3,000-man garrison already dispatched to Taras the previous year, Pyrrhus commanded a force of around 28,000 men, modeled on the army of Alexander. The elephants had become a staple in Hellenistic warfare and had never been seen in Italy before. Against inexperienced men and horses, these beasts could prove useful, but in general were ineffectual against experienced heavy infantry.⁵⁷ Most of Pyrrhus' men were drawn from Epirus, but were supplemented with significant numbers of mercenaries supplied by other Hellenistic kings. His primary patron in this instance was Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, who sought to check the expansion of Ptolemy Ceraunus and Antigonus Gonatas in Greece and Macedonia by supporting Pyrrhus.⁵⁸ Antigonus and Ptolemy Ceraunus themselves also provided some aid in order to get Pyrrhus out of their hair for a time. These forces would be supplemented by men raised in Italy.

Pyrrhus' crossing into Italy is made to foreshadow the hopelessness of his expedition. During the crossing, we are told that Pyrrhus and his men ran into a storm that scattered his ships.⁵⁹ Local Messapians are said to have come to his aid. However, this event seems to have had no significant impact, and may be a later addition meant to

presage the difficulties of the war for Pyrrhus. Similarly, Pausanias claims that Pyrrhus had to sneak past the Romans to get to Italy, but this seems very unlikely.⁶⁰ The story reinforces the Roman nature of Italy and effectively makes Pyrrhus into a thief stealing in at night. Dio offers up an ambiguous prophecy about whether he would conquer the Romans or the Romans him akin to the prophecy given to Croesus.⁶¹ Upon arrival in Taras, the king of Epirus was named as *strategos autokrater* in place of the deposed Agis and he began to put the city on a war footing.

The outbreak of the Pyrrhic War was shaped into a narrative of Roman honor confronting Greek licentiousness. Our sources emphasize the attack on the Roman fleet and the spectacular affronts to Postumius' diplomatic mission, which make for a compelling tale. But a careful analysis of the larger geopolitical contexts of these years reveals a far more nuanced picture of Roman expansion and the attempts to stop it that relied on a combination of diplomacy, force, and internal intervention. War had already broken out in Italy years before the Tarentines got involved, let alone Pyrrhus.

Notes

- 1 Meister (CAH) vii.1.384–411; Green (1993) 220–224; Consolo Langher (2000); Berve (1953). For a brief overview of the ancient sources, which are fragmentary and often reliant on the hostile account of Timaeus, see Meister (CAH) vii.1.384. Diodorus (19.1–21.17) and Justin (22.1–23.2) provide the most detailed surviving accounts.
- 2 DS 19.8.1; cf. DS 19.5.4–6; Justin 22.2.11–12.
- 3 DS 20.71.
- 4 Will (1979–1982) 1.118–20; Berve (1953) 62–68, but see Meister (CAH) vii.1.409–411 who disagrees with Berve's arguments in support of the legality of Agathocles' tyranny and the extent of Agathocles' power.
- 5 Hoyos (2010) 149–176; Huss (1985) 176–203.
- 6 Pap. Oxy. 24.2399; DS 20.15–16; Berger (1988).
- 7 DS 16.67.1–2; 19.5.4; 24.46.1; Plut. *Dion* 25.11–14; *Tim.* 2.31; Berger (1988) 96.
- 8 Meister (CAH) vii.1.408; Consolo Langher (2000) 283–319; De Sensi Sestitto in *La Magna Grecia da Pirro ad Annibale* (2015) 50–58; Seltman (1912).
- 9 DS 14.100–112; DH 20.7; Lomas (1993) 36.
- 10 De Sensi Sestitto (2011) and (2015).
- 11 Tagliamonte (1994); Griffith (1935) 194–212.
- 12 The Romans issued four series of silver didrachms (called Romano-Campanian as they were produced in Campania), on which were imprinted respectively the head of Mars, the laurelled head of Apollo, the head of Hercules, and the helmeted head of Roma, all of which were stamped ROMANO (of the Romans). Pliny (*NH* 33.44) and Livy (*Per.* 15) claim that the Romans did not mint in silver until 269, but probably they are referring to distribution of war loot, DH 20.17; Burnett (1977). The first series with the head of Mars is variously dated to the late fourth century by Mitchell (1969), ca. 300 by Burnett (1998) 21–48;

- Crawford (1985) 25–34, and to the time of the Pyrrhic War by Stazio (1971); Thomsen (1957–1961) 1:210–47. Crawford dates the laurelled Apollo to the time of Pyrrhus and Mitchell only the helmeted Roma. Burnett argues for a 40 or so-year gap in coinage by the Romans between ca. 300 and 260 based on the hoard from S Martino. Holloway in Hackens, et al., eds. (1992) places the Romano-Campanian coins in the First Punic War required by major ship-building efforts that spanned Italy. However, this requires a radical revision of the dates of Tarentine coinage.
- 13 The Samnites, Etruscans, Gauls, and Umbrians joined forces to oppose the Romans at Sentinum in 295, Livy 10.24–31; Plb. 2.19.5–6; Zon. 8.1; Front. *Strat.* 2.5.9; Oakley (1997–2005) 4:268–339; Degrassi (1954) 97.
 - 14 Orosius (*Hist.* 3.22.12) does assert an overt alliance between the Lucanians, Bruttians, and Samnites with the Etruscans and Gauls, but nothing in the scant evidence that survives of the war suggests any explicit cooperation. Orosius may be drawing from Livy’s lost book 12, which covered these events, but the *Periochae* do not mention any alliance nor do any other sources. See Salmon (1967) 255–279.
 - 15 As Polybius (2.19) succinctly summarizes. Walbank (1957–1971) 1:184–214.
 - 16 Plb. 2.19–20; Oros. *Hist.* 3.22.13–14; Aug. *Civ. Dei.* 3.17; Harris (1971) 78–82.
 - 17 App. *Samn.* 6, *Celt.* 11.
 - 18 Plb. 2.20.1–3; Flor. 1.8.21; Dion. Hal. 19.13.1; App. *Samn.* 6, *Celt.* 11; Dio fr. 38; *MRR* 1:188. The scale of this Roman victory is likely exaggerated, Harris (1971) 80–81.
 - 19 The triumph of 281 was over Volsinii and Vulci, which suggests these two cities were the center of fighting, Degrassi (1954) 98.
 - 20 Pliny *NH* 34.32; Livy *Per.* 11.
 - 21 Bispham in Bradley, et al. (2007) 191–214; Salmon (1967) 50–186; Isayev (2007) 55–140; Guzzo (1989) 21–105; Herring in Bradley, et al. (2007) 281–290.
 - 22 Fronda (2006) 409 n. 52; Herring in Bradley, et al. (2007) 281–291.
 - 23 Burnett in *La Magna Grecia da Pirro ad Annibale* (2015) 811.
 - 24 DH 19.13; Val. Max. 1.8.6; Plin. *NH* 9.118; 324.32; Degrassi (1954) 97.
 - 25 In 326 the Lucanians established relations with the Romans, which were immediately abandoned thanks to Tarentine manipulation, Livy 8.25.3, 27; Oakley (1997–2005) 2:685–686. In that same year at Neapolis, the Tarentines promised naval support if the city resisted the Romans, DH 15.5–10; Livy 8.22–23; Kent (2013); Oakley (1997–2005) 2:640–645.
 - 26 App. *Samn.* 7.1.
 - 27 Kent (2013); Lomas (1993) 44–46. The Neapolis affair also suggests that the Romans and Tarentines could have been directly involved in the decision-making process.
 - 28 DH 19.13, 20.4; App. *Samn.* 7.1–2; Plin. *NH* 34.32; Livy *Per.* 11.
 - 29 Intrieri (1987–1988) 27–28.
 - 30 Lomas (1993) 35–36; Intrieri (1987–1988) 25–27. For an archaeological survey of third-century Taras, see Dell’Aglia in *La Magna Grecia da Pirro ad Annibale* (2015) 431–461.
 - 31 Vel. Pat. 1.14.6; DH 17/18.5; Hor. *Sat.* 2.1.35–37. For an overview of Roman activities in Apulia in the late fourth century, see Fronda (2006). For a discussion of Roman colonization in the fourth and third centuries, see Bispham (2006).
 - 32 DH 19.5–6; App. *Samn.* 7; Livy *Per.* 12; Val. Max. 2.2.5; Florus 1.13; Eutrop. 2.11; Oros. *Hist.* 4.1.1–3; Zon. 8.2. Polybius (1.6.5; 8.24) does not mention the attack on the fleet, but does place the blame for the war on Tarentine

- arrogance. Plutarch likewise does not mention the attack on the fleet, which Barnes (2005) 60–61, argues was due to a recognition of Dionysius' unreliability. However, the attack is common to nearly every other source and fits within the geopolitical context of events. Modern discussion of this episode is immense, see in particular Barnes (2005); Wuilleumier (1939) 102–105; Urso (1998) 113–128.
- 33 Dio fr. 39; Oros. *Hist.* 3.22.12.
- 34 Livy 8.17.10; Oakley (1997–2005) 2.681 n. 1; Forsythe (2005) 350; Cary (1920) 165–173; *contra* Barnes (2005) 140–141.
- 35 Thiel (1954) 19–27. For an overview of the early Roman fleet, see Steinby (2007).
- 36 Barnes (2005) 144; Thiel (1954) 24–25.
- 37 App. *Samn.* 7.1.
- 38 App. *Samn.* 7.2.
- 39 Harris (1979) 167–168.
- 40 Barnes (2005) 14–19.
- 41 DH 19.6; App. *Samn.* 7.3; Zon. 8.2; Oros. *Hist.* 4.1.4.
- 42 The Samnites, Lucanians, and Messapians offered their support to Pyrrhus when the invitation was eventually made by the Tarentines, Plut. *Pyrr.* 13.6. The Bruttians were already allied with the Samnites and likewise joined Pyrrhus when he arrived.
- 43 Plut. *Pyrr.* 13.2; App. *Samn.* 7.3. Walbank (1957–1971) 2:101, suggests that the internal political turmoil may go back to a local source, which is rejected by Hoffman (1936) 14–22.
- 44 Plut. *Pyrr.* 13.3–5; DH 19.8; Dio 39.10; App. *Samn.* 7.3. See Barnes (2015) 48–53.
- 45 App. *Samn.* 7.3.
- 46 Plut. *Pyrr.* 13.6.
- 47 Zon. 8.2. A similar strategy was pursued by Pyrrhus during his negotiations with Rome and even later by Hannibal.
- 48 Zon. 8.2.
- 49 The precise order of which came first and what forces each brought is unclear due to contradictory evidence in the sources. Both likely arrived around the same time (or perhaps together) in the fall, Wuilleumier (1939) 108; Lévêque (1957) 282.
- 50 Zon. 8.2; Front. *Strat.* 1.4.1.
- 51 Wuilleumier (1939) 109.
- 52 Hammond (1967) 557–563; Soueref in *La Magna Grecia da Pirro ad Annibale* (2015) 20–22; Lévêque (1957) 240–244.
- 53 Plut. *Pyrr.* 1–12; Justin 17.3.17–22; Lévêque (1957) 83–239; Hammond, et al. (1972–1988) 3:219–238.
- 54 Hammond (1967) 568–569.
- 55 Plut. *Pyrr.* 14.
- 56 Plut. *Pyrr.* 15.
- 57 Scullard (1974).
- 58 Justin 17.2; Hammond (1988).
- 59 Plut. *Pyrr.* 15; Zon. 8.2.
- 60 Paus. 1.12.2; Lévêque (1957) 69–70.
- 61 Dio fr. 40.6.

3 The military campaigns of 280 and 279 BCE

Over the winter of 281/280 Pyrrhus made his personal preparations and crossed into Italy from Epirus, to which the Romans responded with another campaign in southern Italy. The battles which took place acquired fantastic elements that highlighted the grand nature of this war, including brave individual heroics, elephant combat, literal self-sacrifice, and the ultimate resolve of the Roman people. Nevertheless, the Romans suffered a string of humiliating defeats. Pyrrhus outmaneuvered and defeated Roman armies at Heraclea, successfully invaded Latium, and won another victory at Ausculum the following year. Roman generals were not able to match Pyrrhus on the battlefield. Of course these events were quite embarrassing for the Romans, who were particularly proud of their martial skills. As such, the surviving Roman narratives emphasize the tenacity of their ancestors in the face of defeat. They show a consistent desire to minimize the scope of Roman losses or they simply assert that the Romans were in fact victorious. According to the Romans, even Pyrrhus was forced to recognize their virtues and forlornly admit that the war was a mistake. Nevertheless, by the end of 279 Pyrrhus was firmly in control of southern Italy. Throughout Pyrrhus' campaigns in these years, he consistently pursued the more limited goal of controlling southern Italy rather than the outright conquest of Rome.

Preparations for war (spring 280 BCE)

In the Romans' preparations to fight, fanciful elements of the conflict are once again emphasized. We are told that there were certain religious rites that had to be dealt with first, namely the ritual declaration of war by the *fetiales*. The issue was that the ritual required throwing a spear into the lands of Rome's enemy. Epirus was quite inconveniently distant to make this practical. As such, the Romans are said to have captured an Epirote, bought him some land near Rome, and then performed the fetial ritual there as it was now enemy territory.¹ The story is clearly a later invention meant to

emphasize the ‘foreign’ (that is extra-Italian) nature of Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus is depicted as the aggressor invading Roman space. Roman piety is also showcased in opposition to Pyrrhus’ own impiety later in the war. No doubt, the gods were implored by the Romans in their war, but the details of such activities with regards to the declaration of war are subsumed in later myth-making.

Due to preexisting conflicts, the Romans faced a two-front war with Pyrrhus in the south and the Etruscans in the north, which was not much of a deviation from prior years. The two consuls, P. Valerius Laevinus and Ti. Coruncanius, were deployed accordingly.² Laevinus was sent south, which would result in the battle of Heraclea. Coruncanius was sent north to deal with the Etruscans. The consul of the previous year, L. Aemilius Barbula, was prorogated and given Samnium as his *provincia*. He had wintered in Venusia after Pyrrhus’ arrival. The Romans were no stranger to waging wars simultaneously on multiple fronts as their previous conflicts in Italy had often involved several opponents at once. The Romans recognized the threat the king posed as a rallying point, and acted swiftly in an attempt to prevent the wars they were already waging in Italy from coalescing into a coordinated effort as had happened in the Third Samnite War. As such, their generals were deployed to fight aggressively in enemy territory rather than defending Roman lands. The campaign of Coruncanius was a continuation of conflicts that predated Pyrrhus’ arrival. Aemilius’ efforts needed to inhibit Samnite support for Pyrrhus. The campaigns of both Coruncanius and Aemilius are poorly attested, but both earned triumphs. Neither the Etruscans nor the Samnites were able to oppose the armies of Rome alone and both consuls likely faced little difficulty. Aemilius was able to prevent the Samnites from sending men to aid Pyrrhus at Heraclea.

Laevinus faced a more difficult situation than his colleagues. He needed to quickly shore up Roman influence in southern Italy in the face of significant diplomatic and military pressure from the Tarentines and Pyrrhus. Operations in Magna Graecia required long supply lines that could be threatened by hostile Lucanians, Samnites, and Greeks. A base in the south was vital, which meant the return of the pro-Roman leaders of Thurii that had been ousted by the Tarentines. Thurii offered a fortified site that was well situated south of Lucania, near Taras, and on the coast. As he marched south, Laevinus garrisoned sites in Lucania to protect his supply lines and prevent local support from reaching Pyrrhus.³

The Romans also took measures to secure their own allies. They targeted hostile leaders among allied cities, fearing what they termed rebellion. Even the nearby Latin city of Praeneste may not have been free of anti-Roman sentiment, and saw some of its leaders seized and

held in the treasury house in Rome.⁴ This sort of interventionism was not unusual. Amongst existing allies it was a way to empower those who favored the Romans, securing vital military support. Alliances between Italian communities were quite unstable and the Romans felt the need to make sure that the growing scale of this war did not endanger their own dominance.

The Romans expanded their efforts further by deploying garrisons in many areas of the peninsula. The most significant of these was deployed to Rhegium, a city which sat on the straits between Italy and Sicily. Here the Romans sent several thousand men led by their own commander, Decius Vibellius.⁵ The city controlled an important navigational point along the coast that could facilitate contact with a Roman-controlled Thurii and inhibit enemy naval activities along the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy. At the same time, the vulnerable supply lines through Lucania could be supplemented by seaborne efforts. Rhegium would remain under Roman control for the entirety of the war, although the actions the garrison took to maintain that control were extreme. If Laevinius could secure Thurii quickly, the Romans would be in a strong position to prosecute the war.

Roman efforts in early 280 were substantial, organized, and aggressive, which may have caught Pyrrhus off guard. The Romans had seized the initiative and as such it would be Pyrrhus who was forced to react. He had been promised significant Italian support by the Tarentines, but found little. Samnites and Lucanians were not forthcoming due to Roman efforts in their homelands (and perhaps Tarentine exaggeration). The king also needed to make significant efforts to quell hostile factions in Taras that could undermine his control in the future. Not everyone in the city was to be trusted. A Tarentine noble named Aristarchus sought to appear friendly to the king and was eventually sent by him on a mission to Epirus.⁶ Instead, Aristarchus went to Rome. Whether Pyrrhus suspected disloyalty is unfortunately left unclear, but nevertheless indicates the continued presence of pro-Roman factions in Taras akin to those that were evident in the previous year. Pyrrhus implemented measures in Taras to train its citizens and organize its political system towards the war effort. Whether Pyrrhus felt prepared or not, he had little choice but to gather his own forces, supported only by the Tarentines and march to battle when he heard of Laevinius' approach, but his position was far from secure.

The battle of Heraclea (summer 280 BCE)

In the summer of 280, the armies of Laevinius and Pyrrhus met in battle near the Greek city of Heraclea. The sources for the battle are

fragmentary and contradictory, focusing heavily on fantastic elements to compensate for a clear Roman loss. Here, both sides sought a quick end to the war. While the two armies were roughly equal in numbers, Pyrrhus' forces proved themselves far more capable than their Roman counterparts. The king was able to marshal his diverse forces effectively on the battlefield, outmaneuvering the Romans and winning the day. Laevinius found himself unable to match the generalship of Pyrrhus, and the Romans suffered their first defeat of the war.

The two armies were roughly equal in size. The ancient sources do not give precise numbers for the Romans, but Plutarch refers to the 'great size' of the Roman force and Justin says they were more numerous than Pyrrhus' army.⁷ However, these assertions put forward the idea that Pyrrhus' genius allowed him to defeat a numerically superior force, mirroring the achievements of his cousin Alexander the Great against the Persians. For later pro-Roman writers spectacular achievements by Pyrrhus early in the war made the glory of his eventual defeat that much greater, similar to the later victory over Hannibal after his early battlefield successes against the numerically superior Romans. Of course, it was important in the Roman narrative to point out that the Romans were, in fact, not barbarians like the Persians, as Plutarch has Pyrrhus say.⁸ A tradition of numerical superiority of the Romans existed in ancient times, but it served an ideological purpose that undercuts its reliability.

Modern estimates of the number of Roman legions present a range from two to four, with corresponding total numbers (Romans and allies) ranging from 20,000 to 50,000.⁹ There is no reason to think that Laevinius would bring a larger than normal force, despite Pyrrhus' supposed reputation. A standard consular army would have been seen as sufficient. Laevinius likely commanded two legions accompanied by allies, totaling somewhere around 20,000. It is impossible to give a more specific size as early Roman armies varied to some degree in the size of legions and the ratio of allies to citizens. Having left a garrison in Lucania, the Roman army may have been somewhat diminished from its original size.

Pyrrhus had with him an initial force of about 28,500 men, supported by the Tarentines. Pyrrhus' shipwreck on his way to Italy seems to be more of a literary hindrance rather than a historical one and so likely had little impact on the size of his forces. He did disperse some of his men in garrisons to secure his allies' loyalty and defend them from the Roman army led by the proconsul Aemilius. As for the number of Tarentines Pyrrhus could draw from, Diodorus says that they had supported Cleonymus with 22,000 in 302.¹⁰ However, such figures should be approached with skepticism since the Tarentines

also promised Pyrrhus hundreds of thousands of Italians when he arrived. As such, an estimate of between 20,000 and 25,000 men under Pyrrhus' command at Heraclea is reasonable.¹¹ It is difficult to see Laevinius engaging an army that greatly outnumbered his own, even keeping the Roman tendency towards brashness in mind. In the end, it seems that the forces of Laevinius and Pyrrhus at Heraclea were probably of roughly equivalent size.

As the two armies approached one another, their respective commanders supposedly exchanged letters. Pyrrhus is said to have arrogantly offered to serve as mediator between the Romans and the peoples of southern Italy, to which the Romans replied that they did not ask him to mediate nor did they fear him as an enemy. The Romans established their camp on the right bank of the Siris River south of Heraclea, while Pyrrhus set himself up on the left.

Before the battle began, we are told that Pyrrhus attempted to get a sense of the enemy he faced. In one story, he dispatched spies who were immediately captured by the Romans. Instead of executing them, Laevinius showed them around the camp. He then released them, demanding they tell Pyrrhus not to send spies again but to come discover the strength of the Romans for himself. This story is drawn from a well-established tradition of self-confident commanders that included Xerxes, Scipio Africanus, and others.¹² According to Plutarch, Pyrrhus personally observed the Romans from the far side of the Siris and was greatly impressed with their discipline.¹³ Awed at the supposed size of the Roman army, he is said to have wanted to delay the engagement until his Samnites and Lucanian allies arrived but was forced to fight by Laevinius. Roman merits are here built up while simultaneously emphasizing Pyrrhus' strengths.

Laevinius sought a quick engagement, as was typical of Roman generals in the wars of this period, while Pyrrhus saw an opportunity to take advantage of his superior position. With the river between them, one side would have to take the risk of fording it. It was the Romans who acted first and began to cross. The Romans were in hostile territory, which meant that any delay would disproportionately affect their ability to resupply, and they needed to defeat Pyrrhus before his army was bolstered by allied forces. This aggression allowed Pyrrhus to use the river to his advantage by stationing men along it in order to hamper the Romans. As such, they could have inflicted casualties while minimizing their own losses before the battle proper.¹⁴ Zonaras says that the initial attempt by the Romans to get over the river failed, and as a result Laevinius dispatched his cavalry to cross out of sight, presumably further up river.¹⁵ The Roman infantry advanced again directly against Pyrrhus' men, but this time succeeded with the support of their cavalry who attacked from the

rear. Pyrrhus himself led 3,000 cavalrymen to cover the retreat of his river guards and give his phalanx time to form up. The Romans no doubt had taken losses and were tired after fighting their way across the Siris, while Pyrrhus' main force was still fresh. It was then that the main infantry lines engaged.

The exact course of the battle is impossible to determine as the ancient sources do not provide a coherent picture. One spectacular event in the fighting is well attested, however: the attempt to kill Pyrrhus by a Ferentani ally in the Roman army named Oblacus (or Oplax) Volsinius.¹⁶ During the course of the fighting, Pyrrhus was moving around the battlefield directing his men and giving aid where needed. Oblacus was the leader of a Roman allied cavalry contingent and is said to have followed the king's movements with the intention of engaging him in single combat. Pyrrhus' companions noticed Oblacus and warned the king, but they were ignored. Seizing an opening, Oblacus charged at Pyrrhus. Despite his heroics, Oblacus was intercepted by the king's bodyguards and killed.

Whether or not this story is in any way based on reality, it speaks to a profound difference between the Greeks and Italians that was promoted by the surviving sources. Pyrrhus was noted for his personal bravery in battle, but when faced by a powerful young warrior like Oblacus he relied on his bodyguards for protection. Italian vitality is juxtaposed with a Greek desire to avoid fighting when the situation was not in their favor. The fact that this story is attached to a non-Roman is not especially surprising. The heroics of Italian allies are highlighted in other instances such as the later battle of Pydna, where the Roman victory was ascribed to a group of Paeligni.¹⁷ By assigning this deed to an Italian, it reinforces the interconnectedness of the Romans and Italians after the Social War, when the story was written, and the assertion of Italy as Roman space. Oblacus' actions thus become Roman by transference.

According to Dionysius and Plutarch, as Oblacus was falling from his own speared horse, he managed to kill Pyrrhus' own steed. The king was pulled to safety by some of his friends while others finished off the attacker. The situation so badly shook Pyrrhus that he switched armor with one of his Companions, Megacles, in order to avoid another such incident. When Megacles was killed in the royal raiment, the Epirote army supposedly began to lose morale. Only Pyrrhus showing himself unharmed saved the day. The king displayed a moment of weakness (corrected once he again exposed himself), and it supposedly nearly cost him the battle as the Romans surged forward. Pyrrhus was a dangerous foe, but he was not invulnerable. Florus goes so far as to say that Oblacus put Pyrrhus and his men to flight, giving the Romans the battle.¹⁸ The episode with Oblacus is gripping but can

hardly be taken as anything based in historical reality, at least in the way that it has survived.

Setting aside Florus' fanciful assertions, we are told that the battle was hard fought with changing fortunes on both sides, which is a common theme in early Roman battles about which little historical information survived for later writers to use. In the end, Pyrrhus outmaneuvered his Roman opponents and won the day. Exactly how he did so is unclear. Laevinius may have attempted to outflank Pyrrhus with hidden cavalry, only to see this force thwarted by Pyrrhus' elephants which caused the Roman horses to flee due to their frightening smell.¹⁹ The elephants may then have charged into the Roman infantry in pursuit of the cavalry, followed up by a charge of Pyrrhus' Thessalian cavalry.²⁰ Whatever the precise details, the Epirote phalanx seems to have held the Roman infantry in place while the more mobile cavalry and elephants outflanked them. The Roman cavalry was scattered and Pyrrhus' cavalry and elephants wreaked havoc amongst the legionaries. The Romans broke and fled the battlefield.

Plutarch gives different casualty figures for the two sides: 7,000–15,000 for the Romans and 4,000–13,000 for Pyrrhus.²¹ Whatever the exact numbers, the sources generally insist that the Romans took heavier overall losses while Pyrrhus lost his best troops. Zonaras describes a massacre of the fleeing Romans that was only stopped thanks to a wounded elephant throwing Pyrrhus' army into confusion.²² However, the pursuit was probably minimal. In an anecdote, Frontinus recounts that Pyrrhus advised never pressing a retreating army too hard in order to encourage them to retreat next time.²³ In subsequent negotiations Pyrrhus seems to have desired a quick end to the war, which would have been hampered by inflicting undue losses. A little mercy could go a long way. Similarly, the king would release his Roman prisoners in an attempt to foster a positive relationship. The Roman army initially regrouped in the Latin colony of Venusia in Apulia about 75 miles to the north where the now proconsul Aemilius had spent the previous winter.²⁴

In their first engagement, Pyrrhus had defeated the Romans. Even without the presence of his Italian allies, the king utilized the Siris River, his superior cavalry, and his elephants to win an impressive victory. His position in southern Italy was much more secure, buffered by his alliances with the Samnites and Lucanians. Any pro-Roman factions in cities such as Thurii had little hope of immediate support. Soon after the battle, the Samnite and Lucanian armies arrived to join the king. We are told that Pyrrhus scolded them for being late, but was so pleased with his victory that he shared some of the spoils with them anyway, hoping to secure their continued friendship.²⁵ Of

course, the disparaging assertion by later Roman writers that the Samnites were waiting to see who won the battle ignores the fact that a Roman army was campaigning in Samnium. The Romans made similar claims about the purposeful delays of the Samnites with regards to the battle of Vesperis in 340 when they were ostensibly allied with the Romans.²⁶ In celebration of his victory, Pyrrhus sent a bronze tablet to the shrine of Zeus at Dodona on behalf of himself and the Tarentines, which undercuts the claims by some later Romans that Heraclea was not a defeat.²⁷ Now bolstered by a substantial force of Italians, Pyrrhus marched north into central Italy.

The Latium campaign (late summer 280 BCE)

With Pyrrhus having won the battle of Heraclea, the question becomes what he intended from there. He seized the initiative, marching north into Latium within a short distance of the city of Rome. However, Pyrrhus did not have the time, resources, or desire to lay siege to the city. This was not a campaign of outright conquest, but one intended to force the Romans to the negotiating table and accept a peace favorable to the king. While the campaign ultimately did not achieve Pyrrhus' strategic goals, it demonstrated the danger that he represented to the Romans as the war continued.

The Tarentines had been the ones to invite Pyrrhus to Italy, but he found his strongest military allies to be the Samnites. They supplied capable warriors for his army and would serve as a significant buffer against future Roman incursions southward. The Samnites had been fighting the Romans for much of the previous 60 years, inflicting severe defeats on them at times. But they had suffered massive losses in return. The Samnites were forced repeatedly to accept peace dictated by Rome. Too weak to stand alone anymore, they were subordinate allies for Pyrrhus. To secure their loyalty he offered the Samnites a chance to return to their past glories when they rivalled Roman power, a promise that Hannibal would also offer at the end of the century. They were also a potential source of mercenaries for any future military campaigns in Italy or elsewhere.

With Pyrrhus' backing, the Samnites could potentially resist Roman aggression in the future. Samnite leaders no doubt played a key role in the planning of Pyrrhus' campaign northwards. They knew the terrain well from personal experience. For Pyrrhus there was a possibility of gaining new allies in the north, aided by preexisting Samnite connections. During the many wars that were fought across the Italian peninsula in the century before Pyrrhus' arrival, various coalitions had existed. As the Roman alliance system expanded, their enemies had also banded together. Most spectacularly, in 295 the Samnites,

Etruscans, Umbrians, and Gauls joined forces under the Samnite Gellius Egnatius.²⁸ The subsequent battle of Sentinum had been close fought, but it was ultimately a Roman victory that resulted in the strengthening of Roman power across the center of the peninsula. With Pyrrhus' arrival, there was a possibility of recreating that coalition. Bringing in Etruscan support would have served Pyrrhus' purpose well in forcing the Romans to make peace so that he could turn his attention elsewhere.

Immediately after the battle of Heraclea, Laevinus regrouped his forces at Venusia, but then quickly withdrew across the Apennines to Capua. Zonaras says that Laevinus followed Pyrrhus' army and harassed it while it marched to Campania before taking up position in Capua, but such a move would have risked a second defeat against a now stronger opponent and so seems unlikely.²⁹ The move from Venusia to Capua required a march through the mountains of Samnium, a maneuver made necessary by the threat of being cut off from any reinforcement or support by Pyrrhus. Laevinus needed to move quickly before the march became impossible. Pyrrhus himself set off north from Magna Graecia, securing alliances with nearby peoples and removing Roman garrisons where possible in Lucania and Apulia. The king did not need to root out each and every Roman soldier. He needed to create a stable situation and an image of strength. Future negotiation would, theoretically, see the withdrawal of any Roman garrisons that were too troublesome to remove at present. Speed was the key to success. He would pursue a similarly aggressive strategy in Sicily.

Pyrrhus' exact line of march is not recorded, but within a short time his army entered Campania. The plain was the richest of Italy and its loss would have been felt severely by the Romans. As such, the Romans had taken measures to secure northern Campania under their control. The people of Capua, one of the wealthiest cities on the peninsula, had been integrated into the Roman citizen body in a fashion, while colonies of former Roman citizens had been established in the northern portions of the plain.³⁰ Laevinus had been reinforced with two freshly raised legions while he fortified the defenses of Capua.³¹ Whether or not Pyrrhus hoped the Capuans would rebel against Rome, the consul's presence and anti-Samnite sentiments precluded any such event.³² Pyrrhus apparently had no siege equipment and certainly would not have wanted to get bogged down in a long attack on a well-garrisoned city, and so he moved south instead.³³ The Greek cities in the southern areas of the plain such as Neapolis and Nola had resisted Roman conquest, and may have seemed a ripe target for defection. But his efforts were for naught. All of Campania remained firmly under Roman control and so Pyrrhus

turned north towards Rome itself.

The Roman response to these setbacks, first the loss at Heraclea and then the invasion of Campania, can be divided into two categories. The first was practical. Two new legions had been raised and dispatched to Laevinus. Rome boasted a large population and easily made up the losses suffered in battle. No doubt these citizen forces were bolstered with further allied levies as well. The second was a psychological response. According to Plutarch, Laevinus was derided in the Senate by Fabricius, the man who had temporarily returned Thurii to its Roman alliances and who would soon be sent to treat with Pyrrhus about the ransoming of prisoners.³⁴ According to Fabricius, the Epirotes had not beaten the Romans; Pyrrhus had beaten Laevinus. It is said that strong language was used to discuss the war. According to Dio Cassius, the young men were inspired to volunteer for military service, fearing that the survival of the state depended on it.³⁵ Such was the need for the Romans that they conscripted even the poorest citizens.

All of this clamor and tumult speaks to a rote literary response to defeat for the Romans. It immediately calls to mind their losses to Hannibal and Cannae in 216, when the surviving consul C. Terentius Varro was thanked for not despairing of the Republic (although he was subsequently relegated to insignificance), new armies were raised through extraordinary means (including the poor and slaves), and the Romans were united by a common sense of patriotism. The conscription of the poor also echoes the wars that took place during the Struggle of the Orders, when Romans had set aside political/social divides to face their enemies for the good of the community. The response to Rome's various defeats informed and shaped one another. Nevertheless, the psychological response to the losses suffered early in the war with Pyrrhus speaks to the reason why, in the Roman mind, they ultimately came out victorious. While there was some political discord, there was no outbreak of the kind of turmoil that could have endangered the stability of the state. Laevinus was upbraided, but left in his position. The young men volunteered to defend their country, despite Pyrrhus' now more fearsome reputation. And even the poorest citizens contributed to the defense of the city. This was a message of unity, determination, and strength that would see the Romans through the war.

Having met with little to no success in Campania, Pyrrhus marched his army into Latium. He chose the northern road, the Via Latina, a path which passed by the Latin colonies of Cales and Fregellae before moving into the territory of the Hernici, ancient Roman allies, and then dropping out of the foothills near the Latin cities of Praeneste and Tusculum.³⁶ The Via Latina offered the easier invasion route as

opposed to the Via Appia, which traveled along the coast but passed through chokepoints near Formiae and Fundi where the mountains nearly come down to the sea.³⁷ The Samnites no doubt welcomed the chance to raid Fregellae as they had long resented the colony that sat in the strategic Liris river valley between Latium and Samnium.³⁸ Pyrrhus made it at least as far as Anagnia, some 38 miles from Rome, and perhaps as far as Praeneste, only 20 miles from the city.³⁹ However close Pyrrhus got, his presence was concerning to say the least. However, he could not have intended to actually invest the city. First, he lacked siege equipment and time for it. (He would run into the same problem at Lilybaeum in Sicily.) And second, his army was now dangerously exposed deep in Roman territory. Roman allies and colonies stood to every side. A siege would have taken months at the very least, inviting attacks on his forces and long supply lines. This was a campaign of intimidation rather than conquest.

In the end, Pyrrhus' lightning raid deep into Roman territory was a strategic failure. His attacks in Campania had yielded no lasting results beyond whatever booty he had found. Any hope of an Etruscan alliance was dashed when he learned that they had already made peace with the Romans and showed little interest in renewing the fighting.⁴⁰ And now, with his army in Latium, Pyrrhus was exposed to counterattacks. The city of Rome was strongly garrisoned, the consul Coruncanius was marching towards him from the north, Laevinius had a strong force in Campania to the south, and Aemilius was still out and about (perhaps still in Samnium). Pyrrhus was in danger of being attacked from all sides. At the same time, by moving too far north Pyrrhus had left his allies vulnerable to attack by the more numerous forces of Rome.

As such, Pyrrhus led his army out of Latium and marched south. Both sides preferred to avoid another battle, and the king slipped past the Roman forces that were encircling him.⁴¹ Pyrrhus marched south to Taras, where he put his army into winter quarters.⁴² Negotiations between Pyrrhus and the Romans followed in which the Romans came near to making peace but ultimately resolved to continue to fight. Nevertheless, prisoners were released. On a proposal by Ap. Claudius Caecus, the soldiers who had been captured were demoted and ordered to camp outside the fortifications until they had made up for their humiliation.⁴³ These men were meant to serve as both warning and inspiration for their fellow citizens in future fights. In order to reinforce Roman confidence, triumphs were celebrated by Coruncanius over the Etruscans and Aemilius over the Tarentines and Samnites.⁴⁴ In the end, Pyrrhus had failed to inflict any significant damage on the Romans or secure an end to the war.

The battle of Ausculum (summer 279 BCE)

After the collapse of the negotiations that followed the Latium campaign, both Pyrrhus and the Romans prepared for continued fighting. The battle of Ausculum is far better attested than Heraclea in the ancient sources, but suffers from significant contradictions between them as well as the same tendency towards exaggeration. The Roman army, commanded by the consuls P. Sulpicius Saverrio and P. Decius Mus, performed far better than that under Laevinus. Nevertheless, Pyrrhus' tactical skills once again proved decisive in a bloody fight that lasted two days.

For Pyrrhus, a second invasion into Campania and Latium was unlikely to produce any significant results when the first had failed to achieve anything. As such the king focused on solidifying his holdings in the south, which meant pushing the Romans out of Apulia. The Romans had expanded their alliances into the region in the Second and Third Samnite Wars, establishing Latin colonies at Luceria (in 314) and Venusia (in 291).⁴⁵ With control of Apulia, the Romans had been able to penetrate the mountains of Samnium from all sides, while eliminating easy raiding opportunities into the plains by the Samnites. For the king, control of the region would alleviate pressure on the Samnites while providing greater protection to the Greek cities of the southern coast. Pyrrhus saw success through a skillful combination of force and diplomacy. He undermined local Roman control by taking the colony of Venusia and perhaps also Luceria.⁴⁶ It was near the city of Ausculum, just north of Venusia, that the Romans faced Pyrrhus once more in battle.⁴⁷ As at Heraclea, the two armies camped with a river (the Cerebalus this time) between them.

Pyrrhus' success in Apulia, combined with the setbacks of the previous year, necessitated a stronger response from the Romans. Both of the consuls of 279, P. Sulpicius Saverrio and P. Decius Mus, were dispatched to confront the king with their combined armies.⁴⁸ The makeup of both the Roman and Epirote armies are better attested at Ausculum than at Heraclea, which Frontinus puts at 40,000 apiece.⁴⁹ The presence of both consuls meant that there were four legions totaling around 20,000 Roman citizens. The Romans were accompanied by a large number of allied forces, including Latins, Campanians, Sabines, Umbrians, Volsci, Marrucini, Peligni, Ferentani, and other unspecified peoples. This coalition represented most of central Italy stretching from Campania through Latium and across the saddle of the Apennines. Dionysius numbers these Italian allies at around 50,000, which is greatly exaggerated. The 20,000 that can be inferred from Frontinus is much more likely. The entire Roman force was around 40,000 men, about half Roman citizens and half allies.

The Roman army is also said to have boasted an odd addition, 300 wagons, which were equipped with spiked poles, grapnels, and torches that could be swung back and forth. These wagons were meant to counter Pyrrhus' elephants, and were accompanied by light infantry for protection. Each consul is said to have commanded half of the army during the battle, as had been done at Sentinum.

Pyrrhus' army was similarly sized and included large numbers of allies as well. Dionysius gives a total number of 70,000 men for Pyrrhus, but Frontinus' figure of 40,000 is again more reasonable.⁵⁰ The core of the army was his phalanx armed and arrayed in the Macedonian style, numbering around 16,000 Greeks. The rest of the army was made up of Tarentines, known as the 'White Shields' who were deployed in a phalanx, the Italian Samnites, Bruttians, and Lucanians, as well as peoples drawn from Greece including Thessalians, Macedonians, Thesprotians, Chaonians, Aetolians, Acarnanians, Athamanians, and Ambracians. The Italians and northwest Greeks fought with spears but in looser formations than phalanxes, with some of them serving as light infantry. Pyrrhus' army also contained a cavalry force slightly larger than the Romans, perhaps 5,000–6,000 when accounting for Dionysius' inflated numbers, and was a mixture of Italians and Greeks. About 2,000 of these horsemen made up the king's personal guard, the *agema*. In addition, Pyrrhus still had 19 elephants. The two armies at Ausculum were larger than they had been at Heraclea the year before, but were still similar in size.

For several days neither side pushed for battle, instead facing off across the open ground that stood between them. We are told that it was during this time that the consul Decius began to consider something spectacular. He was planning to perform a ritual known as a *devotio*, which involved consecrating himself and the enemy army to the gods of the underworld in exchange for a Roman victory.⁵¹ We are told that Decius planned to die to ensure that his army would triumph through the ultimate sacrifice of the individual for the community. This intended action was said to have inspired fear among Pyrrhus' own men such that he took special care to issue orders to his men to capture Decius rather than kill him and complete the ritual. Some sources claim that Decius was thus foiled, while others insist that he died in the fighting.⁵² The consul got the idea, we are told, from the similar sacrifices of his father and grandfather (both Decii Mures) at the battles of Veseris in 340 and Sentinum in 295 respectively. Their two deaths had ensured the Romans' victory in two tightly fought battles over the Latins on the one hand and the coalition of Italian peoples on the other.

However, there are serious problems with Decius' *devotio* at

Ausculum that make it unlikely to be historical. First is the fact that the story is replicated three times in the Roman tradition, with the first two being almost identical.⁵³ Families were expected to act certain ways, and here we see a tradition of self-sacrifice attached to the Decii Mures being replicated in a period long before the advent of a native Roman historical tradition. Then there are the specific problems associated with Decius' *devotio* in 279. Dio and Zonaras indicate that Decius survived, which is perhaps supported by the subsequent mention of a Decius Mus in 265.⁵⁴ Even Cicero is vague as to how exactly Decius supposedly died at Ausculum as he does not specifically link it to the *devotio*. In addition, it has been suggested based on a restoration of the *Fasti Capitolini* for 279 that Decius' father was in fact named Decimus rather than Publius.⁵⁵ This would mean that the consul of 279 was not the son of Publius Decius Mus, the consul of 295 who had sacrificed himself at Sentinum, as Cicero and Zonaras assert. Finally, the *devotio* does not appear in Dionysius' narrative of the battle, which is the most detailed that survives.

It is unlikely that any such ritual was successfully completed at Ausculum, or even attempted. The *devotio* of Decius in 279 is a later fabrication modeled on earlier episodes and then attached to Ausculum to introduce a divine element, adding to the spectacular nature of the battle's narrative. The Romans always beseeched the gods before battle, but the *devotio* represents something far more visceral.⁵⁶ The ritual itself invokes dread amongst Rome's enemies in the narrative as well as the reader. The past sacrifices of the Decii in the Roman tradition marked decisive moments in the expansion of Roman power, which the planned sacrifice at Ausculum would mirror. At Vesis the Romans secured control of Latium and Campania. Sentinum was the last major collective resistance of the peoples of Italy. Pyrrhus is portrayed as the first extra-Italian threat to Rome and the culmination of the conquest of Italy. The consul of 279 became the focus of this tale by a coincidence of a shared name that created an opportunity to expand the narrative of the battle.

Both battle lines were made up of a diverse number of peoples that created irregular deployments.⁵⁷ The Roman line was fairly straightforward. The army comprised four legions. On the left wing, facing Pyrrhus' right wing, was the first legion, followed down the line by the third, fourth, and then the second on the far right. The Romans' various Italian allies were divided into four groups (μῆρη), which were interspersed within the line. These allied groupings were not well-organized units (*alae*) as would accompany Roman legions in later periods, but were merely convenient amalgamations of men drawn from a number of different communities.⁵⁸ There is no indication that they acted as unified groups during the battle. Instead, they retained

their native organization under their own commanders, as suggested by Oblacus Volsinius at Heraclea. The cavalry, made up of both Romans and Italian peoples, was evenly divided between the two flanks. The light infantry and anti-elephant wagons were placed with the cavalry. The Roman battle plan was relatively simple: their heavy infantry would engage Pyrrhus' infantry while the combined forces of the cavalry, light infantry, and wagons engaged with Pyrrhus' cavalry, light infantry, and elephants.

On the other side of the battlefield, Pyrrhus placed the core of his forces, his Macedonian-style phalanx, on the right, which was the position of most importance. To their left were Italiote Greek mercenaries, then the phalanx of the Tarentines, followed by the Bruttians and Lucanians. The center comprised the Thesprotians and Chaonians. To their left were the mercenaries from northwest Greece (Aetolians, Acarnanians, and Athamanians), and then making up the left wing were the Samnites.⁵⁹ The cavalry of the Samnites, Thessalians, Bruttians, and Italiote Greeks were on the right flank, while the Ambraciot, Lucanian, Tarentines, and Greek mercenary horsemen made up the left. Pyrrhus placed his light infantry and elephants, divided into two groups, behind his cavalry wings. The light infantry served as protection for the elephants without hindering them. The king, with his accompanying 2,000 horsemen, took up a position behind the main battle line to provide support where needed as he had at Heraclea. Polybius says that Pyrrhus intentionally placed units that fought in looser formations in between units of his phalanx, which would have given greater flexibility and mobility to the stiff formations of the phalanx while preventing gaps in the line from forming.⁶⁰ As such, Pyrrhus' heavy infantry would be better able to maintain coherence while his elephants disrupted and dispersed the Roman cavalry. One of Pyrrhus' greatest strengths, shared with Hannibal, was his ability to coordinate diverse forces in an effective manner. The influence of Greek culture, more specifically the Greek language, in southern Italy no doubt played a significant role in facilitating communication and cooperation.

There are two major versions concerning the battle of Ausculum. The first is the one preserved in Plutarch, which describes a battle that took place over two days.⁶¹ On the first day, Pyrrhus attacked the Romans, but the effectiveness of his cavalry and elephants was disrupted due to Roman seizure of advantageous terrain. On the second day, Pyrrhus drew the Romans onto open ground, seized the high ground for himself, and defeated the Romans through the use of his cavalry and elephants. The second tradition is described by Dionysius and (more briefly) Dio/Zonaras.⁶² Here the battle only lasted a single day, was initiated by the Romans, and ended up being

indecisive. During the fighting, the Romans made good use of their anti-elephant wagons for a time, although they were eventually destroyed. Two legions managed to break through the center of Pyrrhus' line and scatter the Lucanians and Bruttians opposing them. And Pyrrhus' camp was sacked by Roman allies who arrived at the battle late. Pyrrhus was also said to have been wounded in the fighting and took severe losses overall. The fighting was only ended by the advent of nightfall. Plutarch's narrative is the more reliable, as that of Dionysius depends heavily on tropes meant to create a pro-Roman picture while also incorporating incredible happenings. The battle wagons, sacking of Pyrrhus' camp, and the king's wound are all wonderful tales, but cannot be reconciled with the version found in Plutarch.⁶³

The difference between the descriptions of the battle of Ausculum by Plutarch and Dionysius are due to the radically different literary purposes each narrative is meant to support. For Plutarch, the battle is merely one more tale meant to elucidate the characteristic of Pyrrhus as a brilliant commander. As such, it needs little elaboration and plays only a minor role in the *Life* as a whole, meaning that the story is likely little altered from the form in which Plutarch found it. For Dionysius the battle of Ausculum serves as the climax of his *Roman Antiquities*, signifying the mature power of Rome that would go on to defeat Carthage and conquer the Mediterranean. As such, it serves a much more important literary role that dictates the need for the spectacular. It is a grand set-piece between two great powers. The allies of each side are recounted in detail, calling to mind Homer's Catalogue of Ships, Herodotus' descriptions of Xerxes' Persian army and the opposing Greek coalition, and the Persian and Macedonian armies of Alexander's campaign. The listing of peoples and their numbers, 140,000 men in total according to Dionysius, drives home the power that was arrayed across the battlefield. This was not a mere regional battle, but one that takes on profound historical importance as the greatest general of the Hellenistic world was brought to a standstill by the Romans. Dionysius' narrative fits into a continuum of bias meant to glorify Rome. It is the version in Plutarch that is to be preferred.

The fighting on the first day went decidedly in favor of the Romans. The two sides had camped on either side of the Cerebus River, the Romans on the left/northern bank and Pyrrhus on the opposite. Unlike at Heraclea, it was Pyrrhus who endeavored to go on the offensive and cross first. The Romans had seized the high ground and prevented the king from making any effective use of his cavalry or elephants. Their superior position would have allowed the Romans to press Pyrrhus' somewhat disorganized phalanx with their main battle line, while

attacking and retreating from the high ground as opportunities presented themselves. The result was a long engagement that lasted much of the day, at the end of which Pyrrhus withdrew his forces from the fighting. The king had made a severe tactical mistake: he engaged a prepared force of equal size on unfavorable terrain that prevented him from using his elephants and cavalry effectively. Pyrrhus would make up for his error on the second day of the battle, but it is surprising that he was willing to attack at all on the first given his vaunted reputation.

The second day of the fighting ended in a Roman defeat. The precise means Pyrrhus used to turn the battle in his favor is once again unclear, as Plutarch unhelpfully says he employed a stratagem without elaborating on what it was. The king may have seized the high ground the Romans had occupied the previous day, sending some of his men to cross the river somewhere out of sight in an attempt to outflank them, or lured the Romans across the river with a feigned retreat.⁶⁴ By whatever means, Pyrrhus was able to induce the Romans into fighting on more open ground. Pyrrhus' poorly conceived attack the day before would have created a sense of confidence in Sulpicius and Decius that encouraged their own ill-advised offensive. Plutarch says that the Romans launched a furious assault on Pyrrhus' phalanx in an attempt to defeat it before the elephants could be brought to bear. But the king personally reinforced the line. On the open ground he was able to make better use of his cavalry and elephants, supported by light infantry, to outflank the Roman army. The battle wagons, if real, were apparently of little use. As at Heraclea, the Roman line broke and fled. Despite his mistakes on the first day of the fighting, Pyrrhus outmaneuvered the Romans on the second and won the field.

After the battle, we are told that the Romans lost 6,000 men while Pyrrhus lost 3,505, prompting the king to say famously that one more such victory and he would be ruined.⁶⁵ These numbers are perhaps reliable as they are said to have come from Pyrrhus' own memoirs, although in that case some reservation about Roman losses is needed. There can be little doubt that Pyrrhus won the battle of Ausculum, but he took losses that he could not afford. His soldiers were far less replaceable than those of Rome. Nevertheless, the king had secured his control of southern Italy, twice defeating Roman incursions at a high cost.

Remembering the early campaigns of the Pyrrhic War

There is a great deal of disagreement in the ancient literature as to

which battles were won by whom. Heraclea was said to have been a loss for the Romans by Plutarch, Dio/Zonaras, Livy, Justin, Florus, and Eutropius. Meanwhile, Dionysius (via Plutarch) counted it a draw in terms of men lost, while Orosius claims the Romans won. Here most of the ancient writers acknowledged a Roman loss, but not all. The battle of Ausculum, on the other hand, skews heavily the other way. Only Plutarch and Justin say that the Romans lost at Ausculum. Dionysius, Livy, and Florus call it indecisive. Zonaras, Frontinus, Eutropius, and Orosius say the Romans won outright.⁶⁶ Regardless of Pyrrhus' supposed victories or defeats, he is said to have taken severe losses in both battles ranging from several thousand to a preposterous hundreds of thousands. Plutarch says that even though he lost far fewer at Heraclea, they were his best.

In many of the battle narratives it was the elephants, monsters which the Romans had never seen before, that proved decisive. Orosius, the only ancient source to claim a Roman victory at Heraclea, says it was the panicking elephants that broke Pyrrhus' army.⁶⁷ This eastern monarch relied on monsters to give him a decisive edge, but at best they only barely secured him victory and at worst were the source of his defeat. By emphasizing these fearsome beasts, the Roman narrative lessens the sting of their own defeat. They battled the beasts bravely, both singularly and as a body, despite their unfamiliarity. The Romans could hardly have been expected to do any better against such an unfamiliar foe than they did.

Most of our surviving sources exhibit a clear pro-Roman bias that sought to minimize Roman defeats or turn them into victories. However, there is also clear evidence that historians like Hieronymus and Timaeus, neither of whom had any reason to promote a Pyrrhus-friendly narrative, asserted that the king was victorious in the campaigns of 280 and 279. These writers served as a major source for Plutarch, who was not interested enough in the battle narratives to alter them beyond condensing. To a significant degree, the Roman tradition of the war stems from Ennius and ultimately created a narrative that later Romans felt more palatable. This trend was aided by the lack of a Roman historical tradition in the early third century that could have contradicted their preferred version of events. The Pyrrhic War occurred at the end of what can be considered a semi-heroic age of Roman history on the edge of living memory. As such, we get incredible events such as the attempted personal combat of Oblacus Volsinius, the attempt to unleash the divine with the self-sacrifice of Decius, and the various acts to counter the ferocious beasts that Pyrrhus unleashed.

Throughout the battle narratives, the Romans are again and again portrayed as having spectacular bravery. Those elephants that

rampaged across the battlefield were confronted by brave Roman legionaries. In Dionysius' account of Ausculum the Romans display their superiority to their fellow Italians by putting the Lucanians and Bruttians to flight. The allied men in the Roman army are virtually ignored after being mentioned in the deployment; the achievements here were by Roman citizens. Oblacus could be given some glory at Heraclea, but for Dionysius the supposed victory at the more important battle of Ausculum was thanks to the Romans alone. Zonaras claims that Pyrrhus' men were actually afraid to confront the Roman troops.⁶⁸ Pyrrhus is even said to have found the Roman dead all facing their enemy; none had died with wounds on their backs.⁶⁹ They had all fought bravely to the end.

The gallantry of the Romans is nowhere more spectacularly on display than with Decius' attempted *devotio*. This story displays the importance of the community over the individual, fitting the pattern set by such heroes as Cincinnatus and serving as an exemplar for those of the Late Republic when Cicero recounts the story. Pyrrhus' spoiling of Decius' plan is irrelevant; the intention was the key. Pyrrhus may have been the superior general, but the soldiers of his army were nowhere near the match to the Roman people. The king constantly outmaneuvered the Romans, but could not overcome their tenacity. Whether or not the Romans are said to have won these battles, virtue and divine might were on their side. Pyrrhus himself is said to have remarked that he could conquer the world if he was but king of the Romans.⁷⁰ Throughout his campaigns against the Romans, Pyrrhus is constantly portrayed as praising his opponents. He was awestruck when he saw the Roman dead all still facing their enemies. He calls the Romans a hydra, impressed that no matter how many he killed, many more would appear to fight him.⁷¹ Before he had even fought a battle Pyrrhus remarked at the layout of the Roman camp, saying that "these barbarians are not so barbarous."⁷² In their version of events, even Rome's enemies cannot help but be impressed by them.

The Roman narrative of the early campaigns of the war is, at its heart, a fiction built upon a sparsely detailed framework of history. In the first two years of the war the Romans faced a great general who was victorious on the battlefield, invaded Latium, and brought the peoples of southern Italy into alliances with him. But, the narrative insists, the Romans persevered and answered every challenge. This storyline is a stark parallel to the trials the Romans had faced earlier in their history such as the war with Veii, the Gallic sack, and the Samnite Wars. More importantly this portrayal corresponds to the first two years of the Second Punic War, when Hannibal dealt the Romans harsh defeats, threatened to invade Latium, and peeled off many of their Italian allies. Pyrrhus thus becomes a danger to Rome on par

with Hannibal, and the Pyrrhic War serves as a prototype for the later challenges the Romans would face.

It is the kernels of truth that underlie the constructed narrative of the war that must be the basis of evaluation. Pyrrhus had a far more limited goal in mind in Italy that did not include the conquest of Rome. He was not seeking to master the entire peninsula, but to secure control of the Italiote Greeks and establish alliances with the Italian peoples of the southern Apennines that bordered them. He engaged the Romans at Heraclea to drive them out of southern Italy. He campaigned into central Italy to try, perhaps, to take the Greek cities of Campania and more importantly force Roman recognition of his control of the south. And at Ausculum he damaged Roman control of Apulia to strengthen his Samnite and Tarentine allies. All of his actions were aimed not at conquering Rome, but at hegemony in southern Italy in the face of Roman aggression. By the end of the campaigning season in 279 Pyrrhus had, in fact, achieved most of his immediate goals. While his diplomatic efforts did not bear fruit, Pyrrhus was nonetheless in a strong position.

Later Romans took solace in their assertions that they fought to a standstill one of the greatest generals of his era; a man they claimed had skills nearly on par with Alexander and meant to conquer Rome. But in reality the Romans suffered severe military setbacks in 280 and 279. Prior Roman gains in southern Italy had been effectively rolled back.

Notes

- 1 Serv. A. 9.52; Lévêque (1957) 312.
- 2 *MRR* 1:90–91.
- 3 Zon. 8.3.
- 4 Zon. 8.2. Zonaras says that this imprisonment fulfilled a prophecy that the people of Praeneste would occupy the Roman treasury, and then says they died without giving any further information. The story is not found elsewhere.
- 5 See [Chapter 6](#).
- 6 Zon. 8.3.
- 7 Plut. *Pyrr.* 17; Justin 18.1.5; cf. Zon. 8.3.
- 8 Plut. *Pyrr.* 15.
- 9 De Sanctis (1956–1964) 2:392 argues that Laevinius' army comprised two legions plus allies. Franke (*CAH*) vii.2:467 gives a number of 30,000. Lévêque (1957) 322, Wuilleumier (1939) 115–116, and Mommsen (1854–1856) 2:153 argue that there were four legions plus allies.
- 10 DS 20.104.
- 11 Lévêque (1957) 321–322. The figure of 28,500, broken down into specific contingents (Plut. *Pyrr.* 15.1), may derive from Pyrrhus' own memoirs.
- 12 Spies before Heraclea: DH 19.11; Zon. 8.3; Eutrop. 2.11. Xerxes: Hdt. 7.146.7. Scipio before Zama: Plb. 15.5.
- 13 Plut. *Pyrr.* 16.

- 14 *Contra* Delbrück (1920) 4:307–309, who argues that Pyrrhus did not attempt to use the Siris defensively as it would have offered little to slow the Romans down. This line of thought is followed by Lévêque (1957) 325.
- 15 Zon. 8.3; Judeich (1926) 5.
- 16 Plut. *Pyrr.* 16; DH 19.12; Zon. 8.3; Florus 1.19.7. Oblacus Volsinius' name indicates that his family may have originated in the Etruscan city of Volsinii. The story of Oblacus is rejected by Lévêque (1957) 326–327 and Beloch (1922–1927) 4.2:475; *contra* Schubert (1894) 67.
- 17 Livy 44.40–41; Plut. *Aem.* 20; Front. *Strat.* 2.8.5.
- 18 Florus 1.13.7.
- 19 Zon. 8.3. Judeich (1926) 5, n. 1, believes that this cavalry movement may be a reduplication of the earlier hidden crossing of the river by the Roman cavalry.
- 20 Plut. *Pyrr.* 17.
- 21 Plut. *Pyrr.* 17.4; cf. Oros. *Hist.* 4.1.11; Lévêque (1957) 327–328. Plutarch lists Dionysius and Hieronymus as his sources. In his description of Cannae, Appian (*Hann.* 26) says that both Pyrrhus and Hannibal wept at the sight of their best troops lying dead on the battlefield.
- 22 Zon. 8.3.
- 23 Front. *Strat.* 2.6.10.
- 24 Venusia was well situated for the retreating Roman army and provided a good regional base from which to operate, Lévêque (1957) 329, n. 3; *contra* Willeumier (1939) 118, n. 1.
- 25 Zon. 8.3; Plut. *Pyrr.* 17.
- 26 Livy 8.11.2; cf. 10.7; Oakley (1997–2005) 2:506.
- 27 *SIG* 392; Marchetti in Hackens, et al., eds. (1992) 54.
- 28 Livy 10.18–31; Plb. 2.19.5–6; Zon 8.1; Front. *Strat.* 2.5.9; *Vir. Ill.* 27.3–5; Oakley (1997–2005) 4:210–345; Walbank (1957–1971) 1:187–188; Salmon (1967) 263–269.
- 29 Zon. 8.4.
- 30 In northern Campania Latin colonies were established at Cales (in 334), Saticula (313), and Suessa Aurunca (313), while the colonies at Fregellae (328) and Interamna (312) lay just to the north in the Liris River valley, Salmon (1970) 55–69. The Campanians had been granted *civitas sine suffragio* a few decades prior. For an overview of this status, see Oakley (1997–2005) 2:544–559.
- 31 Plut. *Pyrr.* 18; Dio fr. 40.39.
- 32 Lévêque (1957) 336. The city of Capua did later rebel and support Hannibal's invasion of Italy in 216, but whether there was any anti-Roman sentiment during Pyrrhus' campaign is unclear, Beloch (1926) 384; De Sanctis (1956–1964) 2:282.
- 33 Zon. 8.4. Neapolis had been besieged and taken by the Romans 40 years prior thanks to pro-Roman factions in the city, DH 15.5–10; Livy 8.22–23; Oakley (1997–2005), 2:657–658; Kent (2013).
- 34 Plut. *Pyrr.* 18.
- 35 Dio fr. 40.39.
- 36 See Talbert (2000) 44.
- 37 The Samnites were well aware of the dangers of the area, having defeated a Roman army nearby at the battle of Lautulae in 315, Livy 9.23; DS 19.72.7–8; Oakley (1997–2005) 2:330–31.
- 38 Florus 1.13.24; Beloch (1922–1927) 4.1:549, n. 4. Samnite resentment of the colony at Fregellae, DH 15.8.4; cf. Livy 8.23.4–7; Salmon (1967), 216–217; Oakley (1997–2005) 2:623–624.
- 39 Florus (1.13.24) says Pyrrhus could see the dust of Rome from the citadel of

Praeneste, supported by Eutropius (2.12). Appian (*Samn.* 10.3) says Pyrrhus reached Anagnia on the Via Latina, which is supported by Plutarch (*Pyrr.* 17) who says that he came within 38 miles of the city, the distance of Anagnia. Willeumier (1939) 118, accepts that Pyrrhus made it to Praeneste, while Lévêque (1957) 338, argues that he only made it to Anagnia. It is possible that Pyrrhus reached Anagnia first and then moved on to Praeneste, Garoufalas (1979) 356, n. 147.

- 40 Zon. 8.4; cf. App. *Samn.* 10.3.
- 41 Dio Cassius (fr. 40.28; cf. Zon. 8.4) says that Laevinus attempted to engage Pyrrhus in battle, but that the king feared the larger forces of the consul and did not do so. This is a Roman fiction as neither side would have felt confident in a second battle, Lévêque (1957) 356, Willeumier (1939) 118.
- 42 Zonaras (8.4) says Pyrrhus wintered in Taras, while Appian (*Samn.* 10.3) says Campania. It is unlikely that Pyrrhus, who saw little success in his previous march through Campania, would have chosen to quarter his troops so close to the heart of Roman territory, Willeumier (1939) 118; *contra* Lévêque (1957) 357. Appian's assertion may reflect the first leg of Pyrrhus' march south rather than his final destination.
- 43 Front. *Strat.* 4.1.18.
- 44 Degraasi (1954) 98.
- 45 DS 19.72.9; Vell. 1.14.4, 6.
- 46 Zon. 8.5; Beloch (1922–1927) 4.2:489; Lévêque (1957) 377. Salmon (1932) suggests that Venusia was too heavily defended to have been realistically taken by siege.
- 47 Beloch (1922–1927) 4.2: 465–470 argues that the battle took place on the Aufidus River nearer to Venusia, which would have more naturally lent its name to the battle. But he fails to demonstrate the topographic accuracy of the Aufidus over the Cerbalus nearer to Ausculum, Salmon (1932). The location of this battle should not be confused with Asculum, which was further north in Picenum.
- 48 *MRR* 1:192.
- 49 Dionysius (20.1.4–8) describes the Roman side with four legions and 50,000 allies. Frontinus (*Strat.* 2.3.21) gives a much more reasonable total of 40,000 men in the armies of Rome and Pyrrhus respectively, which is followed by Willeumier (1939) 120; De Sanctis (1956–1964) 2:379; and Lévêque (1957) 377.
- 50 DH 20.1.1–4; Front. *loc. cit.*
- 51 Zon. 8.5; Dio fr. 40.43; Ennius fr. *Ann.* 191–194.
- 52 Dio and Zonaras (*op. cit.*) say that he lived; Cicero (*Tusc.* 1.89, *Fin.* 2.61) and Ammianus Marcellinus (16.10.3; 23.5.19) that he died.
- 53 Skutsch (1985) 353–357; Oakley (1997–2005) 2:477–486, with bibliography.
- 54 *Vir. Ill.* 36.2.
- 55 Cavallaro (1976) 271–278.
- 56 Compare the *lex sacra* said to have been used by the Samnites to recruit the Linen Legion in 293, Livy 10.38.2–13; Oakley (1997–2005) 4:392–398.
- 57 Dionysius (20.1) gives the most detailed account of the deployments, perhaps relying on Pyrrhus' memoirs or Timaeus, Lévêque (1957) 329, n. 1; Beloch (1922–1927) 4.2:472.
- 58 Μέροϛ was a generic term for a group that could also be applied to military units. In his description of Punic Wars-era Roman armies, Polybius (6.26.9) does say that allied troops were divided into two general groups (μέρη), each of which was more precisely called a wing (κέρας). However, there is no indication of overall organization or commanding Roman officers (*praefecti*

sociorum) at Ausculum. Livy makes no reference to *alae* in terms of large conglomerations of allied units before the loss of his narrative in 293, although at 10.29.12 he describes a unit of Campanian cavalry as an *ala Campanorum*. No *praefecti sociorum* are referenced prior to the Second Punic War, although the loss of Livy's narrative makes it difficult to say when they first appeared. The groupings at Ausculum may indicate an incremental step towards greater command and control of allied forces in Roman armies, but they lacked any significant overarching organization.

- 59 Frontinus (*Strat.* 2.3.21) gives a slightly different deployment of the infantry. He places the Samnites alongside Pyrrhus' phalanx on the right, which may be a confusion for their cavalry, Salmon (1967) 286, n. 5.
- 60 Plb. 18.28.10; Walbank (1957–1971) 585–588. Similar deployments of phalanxes interspersed with other troops were later made by Antigonos III Doson at Sellasia in 222 using Illyrians (Plb. 2.66.5), and Antiochos III at Magnesia in 189 using a combination of light infantry and elephants (Livy 37.40; App. *Syr.* 32). These Greek/Macedonian parallels suggest that Pyrrhus did not get the idea to deploy in such a manner from observing Roman/Italian armies, *contra* Lévêque (1957) 392–393.
- 61 Plut. *Pyrr.* 21.
- 62 DH 20.1–3; Dio fr. 40.43–46; Zon. 8.5.
- 63 Lévêque (1957) 384–390.
- 64 Lévêque (1957) 386; Wuilleumier (1939) 120; Beloch (1922–1927) 4.2:472–473.
- 65 Plut. *Pyrr.* 21.
- 66 Heraclea: Plut. *Pyrr.* 16; Zon. 8.3; Dio fr. 40.19; Livy *Per.* 13; Justin 18.1.4–6; Florus 1.13.8; Eutrop. 2.11; Oros. *Hist.* 4.1.9–11. Ausculum: Plut. *Pyrr.* 21; Justin 18.1.11; DH 20.1–3; Livy *Per.* 13; Florus 1.13.10; Zon. 8.5; Front. *Strat.* 2.3.21; Eutrop. 2.14; Oros. *Hist.* 4.1.19–22.
- 67 Oros. *Hist.* 4.1.9–11.
- 68 Zon. 8.3.
- 69 Livy *Per.* 13; Eutrop. 2.11.
- 70 Dio fr. 40.19; Zon. 8.3; Eutrop. 2.11.
- 71 Dio fr. 40.28; Zon. 8.4; App. *Samn.* 10.3.
- 72 αὕτη τῶν βαρβάρων οὐ βάρβαρος, Plut. *Pyrr.* 16.5; cf. Livy 35.14.8. Frontinus (*Strat.* 4.1.14), on the other hand, says Pyrrhus inspired Roman camp-making.

4 The diplomatic negotiations of 280 and 279 BCE

The military campaigns of the first two years of the Pyrrhic War were limited to south and briefly central Italy. It is the diplomatic exchanges of those same years that reveal the wider impact of the war. The diplomatic exchanges of 280 and 279 are the best attested events of the entire conflict, which proves both boon and bane. While a relatively great deal of material survives, that information is problematic given the sources' fragmentary or excerpted nature, lack of details, confusion in the timeline, authorial bias, and the significant discrepancies between them. Despite Roman insistence that Pyrrhus desired to conquer Rome itself, his diplomatic efforts were aimed primarily at securing a peace that recognized his control of southern Italy. After the battles of Heraclea and Ausculum, the king made concerted efforts to end his war with Rome. Nevertheless, the scale of the conflict would continue to grow as the Romans rejected a negotiated settlement and the Carthaginians entered the fray.

Before Heraclea (summer 280)

In the events leading up to the battle of Heraclea, we are told that the Romans were not hesitant in declaring war and an aggressive military effort was made. On his way to Heraclea, the consul Laevinus secured control of Lucania and sought to reinforce Rome's Italiote Greek allies.

The first recorded direct contact between the Romans and Pyrrhus was a supposed offer by the king to arbitrate in the dispute between Rome and Taras. Pyrrhus dispatched a letter to Laevinus making his proposal, which the consul ultimately rejected. The exchange is only briefly sketched out by Plutarch and Zonaras, who emphasize Roman defiance.¹ Zonaras portrays Pyrrhus with an unearned air of authority that he has Laevinus label 'rather crazy'. Laevinus then states that he will not come to Pyrrhus as a suppliant but with an army, preferring a trial in the court of Mars. A much fuller account is given in the excerpts of Dionysius.² Pyrrhus begins by boasting of his heritage and past exploits, offers to arbitrate with impartiality between Rome and

Taras, offers an alliance with the Romans, and then declares that he will ensure peace through arms if necessary. Laevinus replies that Pyrrhus is foolish to threaten people with whom he has had no experience, asserts that the Romans punish their enemies by deeds rather than words, pronounces that the Romans would extract retribution from the Samnites and Tarentines, makes a jab at Tarentine duplicity, and finally tells the king to send a proper embassy to the Senate, which will deal reasonably with him. Dionysius' letters are rhetorical creations of his own, similar to the speeches that he incorporates throughout his history, but may be built to a small degree upon historical foundations.³

Regardless of their authenticity, the letters fit into the larger Roman conception of the war as a duel between their own virtuous ancestors and the foreign Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus is portrayed as an invader of Roman space, and assumes haughtiness in his offers to adjudicate. The Tarentines are here clearly in the wrong in their previous attack on the Roman fleet and subsequent humiliation of Rome's envoys. Pyrrhus' offer to mediate thus starts from an untenable position. Laevinus' response stresses Roman rightness in seeking redress while displaying the manly desire for action above talking. In addition, the blame for aggression is transferred from the Tarentines to Pyrrhus, reinforcing the role of the Romans as victims seeking just redress.

The letters also hint at the king's limited goals in his campaign rather than the grandiose plan to conquer the west. He wanted to end the war through diplomacy before any actual fighting occurred. However confident he was in battle, Pyrrhus could not afford many losses in material or time. Settling the Roman-Tarentine dispute would allow him to quickly take full control of the Italiote Greeks, whose resources he could use elsewhere. His offer of an alliance with the Romans may be genuine, as it would potentially give him access to Roman military assistance as allies alongside the Samnites and other Italian peoples. Pyrrhus was attempting to win control of southern Italy with a minimum of spilled blood, but failed to take into consideration the fact that the war that he had entered was a continuation of decades of fighting and was not so easily put to rest. The Romans were accustomed to long drawn-out conflicts and had, up to this point, suffered few setbacks in the lead-up to Pyrrhus' arrival.

Unable to obtain a peaceful resolution through diplomacy, the armies of Laevinus and Pyrrhus fought the battle of Heraclea. Suffering defeat, Laevinus withdrew north. Pyrrhus, meanwhile, launched his Latium campaign, briefly coming within a short distance of Rome itself. The end of the campaigns of 280 brought with it an intense series of negotiations between Pyrrhus and the Romans.

Negotiating after Heraclea (winter 280/279)

After Heraclea, Pyrrhus held a number of Romans and other Italians prisoners who could be used as diplomatic leverage. The Romans dispatched C. Fabricius Luscinus, who had lifted the siege of Thurii, at the head of a delegation to Pyrrhus in Taras where he was wintering, to discuss ransoming the captured men. The events of this episode are heavily influenced by the Roman tradition, which portrayed Fabricius as the pinnacle of Roman virtue: modest, humble, and honest. Indeed, the other two members of the delegation (Q. Aemilius Papus and P. Cornellius Dolabella) hardly appear despite their impressive individual careers. While Pyrrhus sought a quick peace, the larger implications of the wars of Italy made the Romans reluctant at best.

Sometime late in 280 or early 279, Fabricius and the rest of the delegation headed to Taras to meet with Pyrrhus to negotiate the release of Roman and allied prisoners. Fabricius' interactions with Pyrrhus, as they are relayed in the sources, are greatly exaggerated and are discussed below. The ransoming of prisoners was normal after battles and is in and of itself not remarkable.⁴ It is to be expected that the Romans, as the defeated, would be the ones to initiate talks. The Romans offered money or a mutual exchange of prisoners they had captured. However, the discussions quickly took on the much larger question of peace. Determining precisely who brought up the possibility of a negotiated end to the war presents some difficulties. Dionysius and Zonaras insist that it was the king who first raised the topic. They assert that Pyrrhus desired to end the fighting because he had been impressed by Roman strengths on the battlefield and despondent about his own losses. They make Pyrrhus into the suppliant instead of the defeated Romans. Justin says that it was Fabricius who brought up peace, which is more logical.⁵ Dispatching a delegation of such prominent men spoke to the importance the Senate placed on this mission, and perhaps implies forethought as to the potential larger issues that would come up. The Romans would have been at least partially familiar with Hellenistic diplomatic norms through contact with the Italiote Greeks as well as the Carthaginians.

We are told that Pyrrhus asked his counselors for advice regarding the issue.⁶ Milo, one of his most important military leaders, rejected the idea and encouraged Pyrrhus to attack while they had the Romans on their heels. Cineas, his chief diplomat, suggested a release of prisoners without ransom and a concerted diplomatic effort to end the fighting. Milo's advice calls to mind the similar suggestion that would be given to Hannibal after his victory at Cannae, while Cineas becomes the voice of reason. Later Roman writers knew the outcome of the war and, in their view, the futility of it. As such, Pyrrhus and

the rest of his council agreed with Cineas, and the king informed the Romans of his desire for peace. Of course, peace would well serve Pyrrhus' own strategic goals rather than the supposed admiration he was developing for his enemies. However, such an important decision was beyond the power of the envoys, who insisted that Pyrrhus take his proposal to the Senate, which had the authority to negotiate. Dionysius goes so far as to have the Roman delegation preemptively reject the idea, foreshadowing the Senate's response.⁷

It was at this point that Pyrrhus decided to release at least a portion of his prisoners, without ransom, before sending his own ambassadors to Rome. The release of prisoners closely parallels Hannibal's similar release of prisoners in the Second Punic War but also highlights the important differences between the two generals. Hannibal would maliciously release the Italians he had captured, but not the Romans, in order to undermine Rome's alliance system. Pyrrhus' release of prisoners, on the other hand, emphasizes his generosity and his admiration for the virtue of the Romans in general (and Fabricius in particular). Both Hannibal and Pyrrhus acted similarly, but with entirely different motivations. Pyrrhus may have been at war with Rome but nevertheless he has qualities that are admirable, especially being smart enough to recognize Roman greatness. Hannibal was irredeemable. For Pyrrhus, this was a shrewd political move meant to sway Roman opinion in his favor. His victory at Heraclea and the Latium campaign had served as the stick, and now his release of prisoners was the carrot to prod the Romans in the direction he desired.

Whether Pyrrhus released these men immediately or not is difficult to say, due to discrepancies in the sources. According to one version, he temporarily released the prisoners to allow them to celebrate the Saturnalia festival in Rome, but dictated that they must return if peace was not made.⁸ This would place the negotiations in December. It was only after the prisoners had returned that Pyrrhus, impressed by their honor in keeping their word, decided to release them without ransom. Dio, a later and more hostile source, claims that Pyrrhus unsuccessfully attempted to entice the Roman prisoners to join him in his attack on Rome.⁹ The details of the prisoner release have been greatly exaggerated, especially by Dio. Perhaps the prisoners were released only conditionally, pending successful negotiations or a reciprocal release of prisoners by the Romans. He may also have only released a limited number of them immediately as an act of good faith and means of exerting pressure on the Roman Senate. At least a portion of the prisoners seem to have returned to Rome alongside Pyrrhus' diplomatic mission led by Cineas during the winter of 280/279. The overarching tradition of this act is an old one, going

back to Ennius, and is universally acknowledged in other sources despite differences in detail.¹⁰

The negotiations took place on two interrelated but distinct levels, the individual and the institutional. Pyrrhus adroitly operated on both. In their initial meeting, the Roman envoys made their proposals for the release of prisoners while Pyrrhus simultaneously made personal overtures to Fabricius in private.¹¹ Of course Fabricius, as the ideal Roman, refused. Cineas too sought out personal connections among the Roman elite before meeting with the Senate, which Roman writers label as attempted bribery.¹² The intention was to build personal relationships with individuals that could then be used to influence the negotiations on an institutional level. The Roman tradition denies that these efforts were successful and that they went against Roman values, but such relationships were common in early Italian diplomacy.

The Romans were certainly not strangers to this strategy. At Neapolis in 327 Roman envoys had reached out to leading Neapolitans on an individual level in an (unsuccessful) attempt to sway the city away from their Samnite alliance.¹³ They had also acted in a similar fashion in Taras just before Pyrrhus' arrival, and would continue to do so during the war. Individuals with strong personal relationships with people from other communities could benefit economically, politically, or socially from those inside connections, while their own community gained another avenue of contact. Of course such connections could be exploited by a superior power, as the Romans are said to have feared from Pyrrhus. Nevertheless, Pyrrhus' diplomatic efforts were dynamic and multi-pronged in a concerted effort to make peace.

Cineas, after making his rounds to individual members, presented Pyrrhus' peace offer officially to the Roman Senate. Plutarch and Zonaras limit the scope of Pyrrhus' offer to friendship between himself and the Romans, immunity for the Tarentines, and the release of prisoners.¹⁴ Appian and the *Ineditum Vaticanum* describe a much more detailed, expansive, and harsh proposal.¹⁵ Here, Pyrrhus offered an alliance between himself and the Romans that included the Tarentines, a guarantee of freedom for the Italiote Greeks, and restoration of war losses for the Samnites, Lucanians, Bruttians, and Daunians. Both Plutarch and Zonaras can be set aside as incomplete summaries as Plutarch shows little interest in such minutia, and Zonaras was epitomizing the more hostile Dio. They include the most important core of the proposal as later Romans saw it, peace between the two parties, but neglect to give further information that would indicate the strong position of Pyrrhus in the negotiations. The harsher terms of Appian speak to a more realistic proposal from victor to defeated. Pyrrhus was not a suppliant but a victor. Polyaeus says

that Pyrrhus often emphasized the negative impact of continued fighting while urging peace.¹⁶

Appian's proposal also reflects the preexisting campaign goals of the king. Freedom and independence for the Greek cities was already something of a catchphrase among the Greek/Macedonian kingdoms of the Hellenistic east. Greek cities may have technically retained their independence, but in reality were under the sway of whichever ruler was most powerful. This arrangement would have left the Italiote Greeks effectively under Pyrrhus' control. But for the Tarentines their alliance with Pyrrhus was a means to an end: they wanted control of the Italiote Greeks through the historic league.¹⁷ Including the Tarentines in the treaty would serve to stabilize the political situation on the peninsula and, by not including the other Greeks in the same manner, cement the Tarentines as the *de facto* leaders of Magna Graecia on Pyrrhus' behalf. The Tarentines had long coveted that role. Restitution of losses suffered by the peoples of southern Italy from Rome, presumably property, captives, and perhaps territory, would weaken Roman gains in the region, strengthen Pyrrhus' Italian allies, and create a more effective buffer for the Italiote Greeks. How far back such concessions would extend, which is to say whether territory seized before the Pyrrhic War would be on the table, is not specified. Finally, peace between Pyrrhus and the Romans would allow him to turn his attention elsewhere.

Cineas' proposal was thus aimed at securing Pyrrhus' effective control of southern Italy while portraying him as a protector of Greek culture against barbarian aggression. While this proposal weakened the Romans' position in Italy, it did not demand the direct subordination of the Roman state to Pyrrhus and is unlikely to have pushed Roman hegemony back into Latium alone. Despite attempts by later Romans to assert otherwise, the king had suffered no serious setbacks as yet and was in a position of strength, and as such he put forth a proposal that secured his power in Italy. The fact that he did not demand the subordination of Rome is an indication of his limited intentions in Italy from the start rather than a decrease in ambition due to an unexpectedly strong opponent.

The Roman Senate, we are told, was initially leaning towards accepting Pyrrhus' offer.¹⁸ His military success, the release of prisoners, and Cineas' unofficial diplomatic efforts in Rome were no doubt all strong factors in the thoughts of the senators. But, as the story goes, a blind old man was carried in by his sons to change their minds. Appius Claudius Caecus was a former dictator, censor, and consul who had been a major figure in Roman politics for decades, and he vehemently opposed making peace in a famous speech on the Senate floor.¹⁹ The speech is a testament of Roman exceptionalism. He

says that what the Romans were doing (entertaining the idea of peace) was shameful; that their boast about being able to beat Alexander the Great must be an empty claim when they cower to Molossians; that they trembled before Pyrrhus who was merely looking to escape enemies that he could not face at home; and that accepting peace would make people such as the Samnites and Tarentines despise Rome. In response, the Senate took heart and replied that there would be no negotiations with Pyrrhus until he had departed from Italy. They would fight in accordance with their military ethos.

Appius Claudius' speech as it is presented has been shaped by the Roman tradition of the war. The Senate's rejection of peace, inspired by Claudius, is likewise shaped by the needs of the pro-Roman narrative. They first assert that there will be no negotiations until Pyrrhus vacates Italy, laying claim to the peninsula as Roman space. But they could hardly say that they controlled Italy at this point as vast areas still remained beyond their influence in both the south and north. The speech foreshadows the subsequent battle at Ausculum by saying that the Romans would fight on in the face of defeat, preemptively easing the reader's anxiety at the future loss there. (Or predicting the victory some sources insist it was.) The narrative reinforces Roman greatness by having Cineas return to Pyrrhus telling him that the Senate was a council of kings.²⁰ Pyrrhus himself (in Plutarch's account) says that he was fighting a hydra, and was intimidated when he witnessed the Romans raising new larger armies to oppose him. This is a patriotic and moving tale of Roman virtue inspired by a man they would claim elsewhere was one of the greatest generals of the age. For Appius though, Pyrrhus was no Alexander. He was merely fleeing men who had once served under the Macedonian conqueror. He does not deny the danger Pyrrhus represents, but insists that the Roman people could beat him regardless. However, the inspiring speech of Claudius belies a much more complex and dynamic political situation that involved internal and regional politics.

Rome was still beset with the internal political discord that had characterized the Struggle of the Orders. Appius Claudius had made his career in the turmoil of the late fourth and early third centuries, and had capitalized on popular support. Fabricius too was of a similar vein. It may be that Pyrrhus released his Roman prisoners in an attempt to strengthen a popular faction that had appointed Fabricius to seek peace.²¹ Pyrrhus was attempting to take advantage of the disputes that existed within the political leadership of Rome's elites. Cineas' efforts before his formal presentation to the Senate were meant to secure individual support for peace, an effort that was evidently somewhat effective, only to be torpedoed by Claudius and those that supported continuation of the war. The internal political

turmoil was no doubt significant in the face of Cineas' mission, and the king's envoy sought to bend it to his favor. Just as factionalism is evident in other cities during the war, it is found in Rome as well. The Roman community was not a unified monolith, but one whose factions could potentially be manipulated by an outside power.

The regional political situation was likewise complex and fluid. That volatility created further potential prospects for Pyrrhus. At least a few Etruscan cities, which had only made peace with the Romans a few months prior, would have been keen to take advantage of any Roman weakness. Pyrrhus could have also made an excellent case of an alliance between those cities and himself as protection against future Roman aggression. Pyrrhus' existing Italian allies too would have been very interested in these negotiations and their potential impact on the future balance of power on the peninsula. Pyrrhus' immediate need was to match the power of Rome and with the Samnites and Italiote Greeks. The king's approach was carefully considered and aimed at exploiting the divided nature of the Italian peoples for his own benefit. By balancing out the powers of Italy and tying at least some of them to himself through alliances and personal relationships, Pyrrhus would have created a very favorable situation for himself.

However, acceptance of Cineas' proposal would have threatened Roman gains made in central and southern Italy over the previous 40 years. The wars of Italy had been brutal, but the Romans had fought hard to come out on top. Ending the war would also see the stabilization of an alliance network at least partially under Tarentine control that could potentially threaten Rome. Peace endangered Rome's immediate position and presented long-term dangers beyond the suggestion of indirect subordination to Pyrrhus. Continuing to fight certainly meant more immediate hazards against an able general, but it was the lesser of two evils. Besides, the Romans had only been defeated once in battle so far.

It is likely enough that the Romans seriously considered making peace with Pyrrhus. The situation was somewhat grim. Later generations could not deny that some Romans at the time advocated peace, which they found distasteful. Those sources insist that it was the patriotic speech of Appius Claudius that ended any such thoughts and reinvigorated the Roman will to fight. However, his speech is more a reflection of later Roman idealism and anachronism than the reality of the early third century. The Romans were in a poor position in the winter of 280/279, but peace threatened the influence the Romans had fought and died for in the preceding century. Italy was a dangerous place, with the only sure means of survival being military power enhanced through military alliances. Pyrrhus' proposals would

have exposed Rome to her enemies once more by undermining her alliance network and creating a rival one.

But their first loss at Heraclea was followed by a second at Ausculum the next year, and by the winter of 279/278 the Romans were now in a more difficult position. Pyrrhus' own position was only growing stronger as he consolidated control of the south. It was during this time that the Romans found support from a source that later generations considered distasteful, Carthage.

Rome and Carthage

The Roman narrative emphasizes the conflict as one between the Romans and Pyrrhus, but the potential end of the Pyrrhic War in the winter of 280/279 had implications beyond Italy. In particular, the Carthaginians were anxious about the impact on their own Sicilian holdings of a weakened regional power (Rome), the establishment of a new one (Pyrrhus), and a resurgence of the western Greeks. Friendly relations, reinforced by treaties, had long existed between the cities of Rome and Carthage. As such, The Carthaginians dispatched a diplomatic mission and a fleet to Rome led by the admiral Mago in an attempt to make sure the situation in Italy did not disrupt the Carthaginians' own interests.

Italy, Sicily, and Punic Africa were closely tied together long before Pyrrhus' campaign. The Carthaginians had political and economic ties with the peoples of Italy, which had focused on the Etruscans before the fifth century as the dominant Italian power.²² The Carthaginians had also been active in Italy in opposition to Syracusan expansion in the peninsula. The Carthaginians and Sicilian Greeks found Italy, especially Campania, a ready recruiting ground for mercenaries to fight in their wars with one another.²³ The city of Rome was a significant power and as such the Carthaginians had negotiated treaties with them. Over time the Romans were increasingly active beyond Italy, which made matters more challenging from a Carthaginian standpoint. By the late fourth century, Roman power was supported by a modest navy. Nevertheless, the Romans and Carthaginians remained on friendly terms. The various peoples and states of the western Mediterranean in the centuries before the Pyrrhic War were connected in a dynamic diplomatic and economic network. What occurred in Italy had repercussions beyond the peninsula.

The Carthaginians and Romans concluded three treaties prior to the Pyrrhic War: in 509, 348, and 306.²⁴ The first two treaties dealt mostly with commerce and defined relative spheres of influence. These agreements demonstrated the greater influence of the Carthaginians, who claimed control of large areas of Libya and the

western Mediterranean islands. The Romans meanwhile were a growing regional power in central Italy after the collapse of Etruscan hegemony, deserving of continued Carthaginian attention. When Roman influence spread to Campania in 343 during the First Samnite War, the Carthaginians sent a congratulatory golden crown.²⁵ Such an action was no doubt meant to ensure continued Carthaginian access to valuable Campanian markets and mercenaries, while reinforcing positive relations with the Romans.

The third Romano-Carthaginian treaty, the so-called Philinus treaty, has important implications for the Pyrrhic War but is problematic.²⁶ Polybius denied its existence because the Sicilian historian Philinus claimed that it dictated that the Romans and Carthaginians could not cross into Sicily and Italy respectively, making the Romans to blame for starting the First Punic War. In the narrative of the Pyrrhic War, some Roman historians claimed that in fact the Carthaginians had first violated Roman Italy before the Romans became involved in Sicily.²⁷ Polybius claimed that he could find no copy of the treaty in the treasury of the aediles, although given the haphazard nature of Roman record keeping at the time it would not be surprising if it was lost or purposely destroyed.²⁸ Livy does record a treaty renewal between Roman and Carthage in 306, which is probably that mentioned by Philinus.²⁹ There is reason to believe that a third treaty was negotiated between Rome and Carthage in 306, but it is very unlikely that the Romans would have claimed the entire Italian peninsula as its sphere of influence at such an early date. To be sure Rome dominated central Italy, but her influence at the time was still minimal in the further reaches of the peninsula. Likewise, the Carthaginians did not control all Sicily. Whatever the precise nature and wording of the Philinus treaty, it has been twisted irrecoverably into the narrative of the Punic Wars. The same anti-Carthaginian bias also pervades the Pyrrhic War and shapes the way the Carthaginians are portrayed.

Taken as a whole, the Romans and Carthaginians maintained a friendly relationship that had lasted over 200 years by the time of Pyrrhus' Italian campaign. The Carthaginians had extensive economic ties to the peoples of Italy and would have taken a keen interest as Pyrrhus began to gather the Italiote Greeks under his control. The interconnectedness of the Greeks of Italy and Sicily represented a significant threat to the war between the Carthaginians and Syracusans taking place at this time if Pyrrhus, who had familial ties to Agathocles, decided to intervene.

The Carthaginians reached out to the Romans to renew their treaty, probably in the summer of 279 after the battle of Ausculum.³⁰ Of course this was not an altruistic interest in Rome's well-being. The Carthaginians dispatched a fleet of ships under the admiral Mago to

the city of Rome. Polybius says that the two parties renewed their previous treaties, adding the clause that:

If they make a written alliance with Pyrrhus, both parties shall make it, in order that it shall be permissible to bring aid to each other in the territory of the party attacked. Whichever party has need of aid, the Carthaginians shall furnish the ships both for the outward journey and for the return journey, but either party shall furnish the pay for its own men.³¹

The second part of the agreement is relatively straightforward. Both parties agreed to send aid to the other in case of attack, with Carthage's obligations focused on their navy. In such circumstances, previous treaty restrictions on military activity in each other's territory present in earlier treaties were suspended. The last section ensures that the Carthaginians would not have to pay the Romans like other Italians they used as mercenaries. For the Romans it is an assertion that they were not mercenaries but equal allies.

The first part of the agreement, the part concerning Pyrrhus, is more difficult in its meaning. Grammatically, the passage *συνμαχία πρὸς Πύρρον* reads as 'an alliance with Pyrrhus', rather than 'against Pyrrhus'.³² To be sure, the Romans and Carthaginians did not subsequently cooperate much against the king. Instead the pact was intended to prevent one side from making peace with Pyrrhus without the other.³³ The Carthaginians would have been aware of the negotiations between the Romans and Pyrrhus in the previous year, and feared the strength of Rome being turned against them by the king. Further, it was after Ausculum that the Sicilian Greeks began to reach out to Pyrrhus for assistance in their own war against the Carthaginians. Setting aside the grandiose rhetoric that Pyrrhus had intended to conquer Sicily and Africa from the very onset, he represented a serious threat to the Carthaginians in Sicily. The pact with Rome, on the Carthaginian side, was intended to keep Pyrrhus in Italy, or, if peace was made, to prevent him from going to war against the Carthaginians who would become an ally of an ally.

The benefits and motivations on the Romans' side are made more difficult due to the hostility of the Roman tradition towards the Carthaginians. The shadow of the later Punic Wars weighs heavily on Carthaginian involvement. Mago offered some sort of direct aid for the Roman war effort, which the Senate rejected.³⁴ He is then said to have reached out to Pyrrhus, acting in a stereotypically duplicitous fashion. The implication is clear: Carthaginians were not to be trusted even before the Punic Wars. Long before those wars, they were actively trying to undermine the Romans in Italy by attempting to play both sides of the Pyrrhic War. Even when the Carthaginians seemed to be allies, they were still enemies. The Roman Senate was able to see

through their intentions and, in patriotic fashion, rejected their (insincere) offer of aid. They did, nevertheless, renew the treaty, an undeniable fact due to its documentation.

It is useful to compare a later offer of help from the Carthaginians and the Roman response to it. Livy says that during the war with Antiochus in 190 BCE the Carthaginians offered naval support, grain, and to pay off their war indemnity in support of the Roman war effort. Here too the Senate rejected the offer. But notably they accepted a similar offer from a more trustworthy source, the Numidian King Masinissa. The help they accepted or rejected was not dictated by need; they were strong enough to stand alone. Even though they had suffered badly at the hands of Pyrrhus, the Romans would persevere without help from the vile Carthaginians. The Senate in 190, Livy says, would only take the ships that were required of Carthage by their treaty even though no such stipulation is indicated anywhere else.³⁵ The Romans refused the offer of help; they dictated what they wanted. Help from true allies, like Masinissa, was welcome. By rejecting the Carthaginian offers of aid, an image of Roman autonomous strength is created.

The mission of Mago and the renegotiation of the treaty are not specifically connected in the ancient sources, although the timing indicates this was the case.³⁶ The size of Mago's fleet (120 ships) was meant to impress the Romans and reinforce their resolve in the face of their recent defeats.³⁷ A buttressing of the Roman-Carthaginian relationship, with assurances that neither would make peace with Pyrrhus and turn against the other, is logical given the situation. While there was no explicit agreement that the two peoples would fight Pyrrhus in cooperation, the understanding that the Carthaginians would soon be involved is clear. The Carthaginians were undoubtedly already aware of Syracusan overtures to Pyrrhus to come to their aid in Sicily. However these events came down to subsequent Roman generations, later historians found them distasteful. The narrative was reshaped into one of anti-Carthaginian animus. Carthaginian aid was not wanted or needed, and was in fact a trick. Luckily the Roman Senate was wise enough to reject the offer of aid, a caution that is confirmed by Mago's supposed visit to Pyrrhus. (Pyrrhus too was not taken in by *fides Punica*, sending the admiral away.) Despite these depictions, the Romans and Carthaginians found themselves effectively on the same side as Pyrrhus became involved in the disputes of Sicily as he had in Italy.

The diplomatic situation in 279

There were diplomatic contacts between the Romans and Pyrrhus

following the battle of Ausculum, which had ended in another victory for Pyrrhus. Plutarch, Appian, and Zonaras refer to a second attempt at peace by the king, which is missing in the epitomized accounts of Justin and the *Periochae* of Livy. Unfortunately, those that record a second round of negotiations differ significantly in detail. Further, they bear a great many similarities to the negotiations of 280, with some clear duplication of materials.³⁸ The Romans certainly had reason to again meet with the king after a second defeat. Pyrrhus, our Roman sources insist, was now desperate for peace, which was fueled by a sense of futility in the face of Roman manpower and a desire to seek easier conquests. Of course such assertions are meant to bolster the positive portrayal of the Romans by making Pyrrhus the one pursuing peace. But, given the strategic situation, Pyrrhus had ample reason to want an end to the fighting beyond the anachronisms of the sources. In 279, the king sought to shore up his control of southern Italy in order to move onto a new phase of his campaign beyond Italy.

As with so much surrounding the Pyrrhic War, the impetus for the negotiations in 279 found in the sources is unbelievably fanciful. In sum, Pyrrhus' doctor approached the consul Fabricius offering to poison the king in return for money.³⁹ Fabricius refused the offer and informed Pyrrhus, who was so impressed that he attempted again to make peace with the virtuous Romans. Pyrrhus, we are told, was already regretful of getting involved in the war and so this was a perfect excuse for him to reach out again. In general, the story as described is too far-fetched to give any historical credence. In addition, Fabricius was not the consul in 279 but 278.⁴⁰ The most likely explanation is that this story of incredible Roman nobility, whatever its original form, was attached to the noblest character of the war without regards to whether it fit the timeline or not.

Pyrrhus did not need some fabulous proof of Roman virtue in 279 in order to desire peace. He was in a strong position having defeated the Romans in two battles, invaded Latium, and firmly held much of southern Italy. His battlefield casualties may have been serious and the recruitment of new armies by the Romans a concern, but the war was clearly still in his favor. Pyrrhus' growing interest in Sicily is only surprising if we accept the idea that he had up to this point desired to conquer all of Italy. However, this claim is later Roman tradition meant to give the impression that the Romans had through their perseverance blunted his aspiration to conquer Italy. Historic attempts to unify the Greeks of Italy and Sicily provided a useful model for Pyrrhus, making this shift in theaters a natural extension of the king's current efforts. Pyrrhus wanted peace in 279 for the same reasons he had in 280; he desired the resources of the western Greeks, not to conquer Rome. As such, he once again dispatched envoys (perhaps led

by Cineas) to approach the Senate about ending the fighting.

The exact nature of Pyrrhus' delegation is opaque due to duplication and confusion of details from his diplomatic efforts the previous year. The position of each side had changed little; the Romans were still on their heels while Pyrrhus was still in a strong position. The exchange of prisoners is revisited and Appian says that Cineas again approached the Roman nobility with bribes.⁴¹ Renewed efforts to work in both official and unofficial channels are probable enough. Whatever connections Cineas had forged in his prior visit to Rome could prove useful to once again pressure the Senate to make peace. And the exchange of prisoners would certainly have been important after a second battle.

Beyond his negotiations with Rome, by the fall of 279 Pyrrhus' situation was becoming quite complicated as various delegations arrived to ask for his assistance from elsewhere. Political and military conflict was rife around the Mediterranean, and Pyrrhus' reputation had received a significant boost thanks to his success in Italy. Two years prior, Celtic groups had begun to invade Greece and in 279 had killed Ptolemy Ceraunus, the king of Macedonia.⁴² The general political confusion of the eastern Mediterranean meant that there was no clear successor to Ptolemy, leaving the throne open. Other Hellenistic kings and generals were too preoccupied in their own squabbles to give much thought to defending Macedonia and Greece from barbarians at the moment. In the west, the Sicilian Greeks were falling prey to renewed Carthaginian aggression and the most powerful Greek city, Syracuse, had been engulfed in civil strife since the death of Agathocles ten years prior. To make matters worse, after a two-year absence a minor rebellion had broken out in Epirus threatening Pyrrhus' control of his own kingdom.⁴³

Pyrrhus needed to choose where to focus his attention. His Italian possessions were seemingly safe for the time being, which would be further strengthened if peace with the Romans could be established. Macedonia and Syracuse beckoned to him, supposedly rousing Pyrrhus to berate Fortune for giving him two chances at glory when he could only pursue one.⁴⁴ However, even with his recent success Pyrrhus was no match for the powerful Hellenistic monarchs of the east. The situation in the eastern Mediterranean was in flux with the recent deaths of Lysimachus and Seleucus in addition to Ptolemy Ceraunus, but Pyrrhus' resources were still comparatively modest. He had already been dependent on outside assistance to provide soldiers and money for his campaign in Italy. He needed control of his own assets to assert himself in Hellenistic circles. At the same time, bringing the Sicilian Greeks under his control was surely already part of his campaign plans. Perhaps Pyrrhus anticipated a quick victory on the

island. Certainly the situation in Macedonia did not seem in immediate danger of being settled. By establishing hegemony in Sicily and southern Italy alongside Epirus, Pyrrhus would have been in a strong position to not only make a bid for the Macedonian throne, but hold it.

The Tarentines had long seen themselves as the rightful leaders of the Italiote Greeks, and were now able to assert themselves to a greater degree with Pyrrhus' backing. They served as Pyrrhus' base of operations and acted as his primary agents in Italy, which they celebrated. A statue of Victory bearing a military trophy and standing atop a globe was commissioned from a student of the famed sculptor Lysippus.⁴⁵ A new series of silver didrachms was struck with traditional images of Taras combined with Pyrrhic elephants.⁴⁶ Notably, Pyrrhus' elephant is much smaller and almost an afterthought on the coins. Italiote Greek cities that had long resisted Tarentine leadership, especially Croton and Locri, now submitted to Pyrrhus and tacitly Taras.⁴⁷ Thanks to Pyrrhus, the Tarentines enjoyed the effective control over their fellow Italiote Greeks that they had always wanted.

But not everything was going as the Tarentines desired. Pyrrhus' presence was both good and bad. Although the Tarentines were greatly strengthened by the king, he also instituted reforms in the city when he supposedly witnessed how lax the population was. Pyrrhus put the city on a war footing, introduced military exercises, closed the gymnasia, ended the drunken festivals of the populace, and otherwise disrupted life of Taras.⁴⁸ Some Tarentines were so unhappy with these changes that they fled the city. While no doubt exaggerated as an attack on Greek decadence, there would have still been many in the city that resented his presence. Pyrrhus' control of the city was for the purposes of the war, instituting little change of Taras' political institutions.⁴⁹ There certainly had been a pro-Roman faction in the city prior to the king's arrival who may have agitated against Pyrrhus' control. For Taras as a whole, the prospect of Pyrrhus' departure for Sicily would have allowed greater freedom to run their own affairs with less interference, regardless of whether they supported him or not.

We are, unfortunately, very poorly informed about the activities of the other Italian peoples. They appear largely as passive actors who only react to the actions of the primary antagonists of the war. The loss of Livy is felt particularly with regards to the other peoples of Italy. The Samnites would have continued to act in their own interest against the Romans as they had for decades. Perhaps they sought to undermine Roman alliances in Campania and the Liris River Valley akin to similar efforts in years past. Rome's own Italian allies would

have likewise been active in challenging local Samnite aggression. However, these dynamics do not fit into the general depiction of the war. Other peoples were merely supporting cast with varying degrees of relevance. Nevertheless, warfare in Italy was endemic and undoubtedly continued below the battles and negotiations taking place between the major powers, but it has fallen out of the surviving sources.

The sudden diplomatic involvement of the Carthaginians added further wrinkles. After Agathocles' death, the Carthaginians had managed to expand their control in Sicily against the Greeks there. Syracuse, always Carthage's staunchest opponent, was in political chaos and could not mount an effective defense against a Carthaginian attack on the city. The resulting Syracusan diplomatic mission to Pyrrhus no doubt played a role in Carthage's own decision to send Mago and a fleet to Italy. Mago's mission in Rome had been a success with a new agreement, and he is said to have then traveled to speak with Pyrrhus. The Roman tradition depicts this as *fides Punica*, implying a desire to make a preemptive peace with the king and backstab the Romans. But there is no reason to think, if it occurred at all, that this mission was aimed against Rome or that the Romans were necessarily unaware of it. The Carthaginians did not want Pyrrhus in Sicily and as such Mago could have acted as a counterweight to the Syracusan delegation to the king. Indeed, the Carthaginians may have even purposely negotiated with the Romans first in order to give Pyrrhus further enticement to stay out of their business.

Unlike the year before, in 279 the Romans had the implicit backing of Carthage to bolster their resolve to continue the fighting. The Romans were no strangers to long, bloody conflicts, which were the norm in Italy. But Carthaginian support, even if only ideological, was nonetheless significant. The Romans still boasted impressive manpower reserves of their own population as well as that of their allies in central Italy. Pyrrhus had done little damage to the Roman alliance system, which never appears to have been a goal on his part.⁵⁰ Losses in Apulia were significant, but Lucania, which was now under Pyrrhus' control, had only been tenuously tied to Rome. Meanwhile, the Campanians and peoples of the central Apennines remained staunchly pro-Roman. The losses suffered at Heraclea and Ausculum were substantial, but not debilitating. Similar defeats had been suffered against Samnites, Etruscans, and Gauls in the past. Pyrrhus' invasion north, which had failed in its intended purpose to intimidate, was not repeated. The Romans had suffered setbacks, but remained in control of central Italy.

Cineas, or whoever led Pyrrhus' second delegation, no doubt found

some Romans open to the idea of peace, but once again could not obtain an end to the war. However, a prisoner exchange seems to have been again agreed upon by the two sides.⁵¹ Fabricius may have been involved in this arrangement, but it is unclear. For the Romans, the inevitable military involvement of the Carthaginians would divide Pyrrhus' attention and create opportunities for Roman gains. Meanwhile, the pact that had been negotiated reduced, if not precluded, the possibility that the Carthaginians would make peace with the king without them. For the Romans, the war was far larger than merely their fight with Pyrrhus. Peace with the king may have been a theoretical possibility, but the Samnites were another matter. These preexisting conflicts required continued Roman attention and necessitated that the war continued.

By 279, the Pyrrhic War had become a convoluted mess. Pyrrhus, Romans, Carthaginians, Tarentines, Syracusans, Samnites, and more all competed in the pursuit of their own goals. Diplomatic missions crisscrossed the Italian peninsula and the wider Mediterranean alongside the armies that marched to battle. Pyrrhus had through his intervention placed himself at the center of all of this, juggling a dozen different competing interests in the midst of a complex web of prior conflicts while attempting to further his own agendas. In the end, the king chose to continue with his plans in the west and accepted the Syracusan requests for help. The Macedonian throne would have to wait. Peace with Rome would have been desirable, but the situation seemed sufficiently under control for him to turn his attention elsewhere for a time. At the very least, Pyrrhus could count on the Tarentines and Samnites to continue to act as his agents on the peninsula in his absence.

Fabricius and the king, virtue at odds

The theme of virtue underpins all of the negotiations in 280 and 279. In particular, the character of Fabricius is presented as the embodiment of Roman values in his dealings with Pyrrhus. Fabricius was a major figure in the war, serving as an envoy to the king in 280 and perhaps 279, and as consul in 282 and 278.⁵² Fabricius' interaction with Pyrrhus took on a legendary nature, emphasizing his personification of the Roman values of humility and honesty in the face of temptation and difficulty. He was the pinnacle of Roman virtue, a theme that permeates all of the sources and is commonly referenced as an example to be emulated.⁵³ Pyrrhus himself serves as the foil to Fabricius' outstanding character.

Fabricius, we are told, was a poor man despite his great reputation and noble family, conjuring comparisons with that other epitome of

Roman values Cincinnatus, who worked in the fields alongside his slaves.⁵⁴ Pyrrhus wanted Fabricius to advocate for peace and promised him rich rewards to make up for his poverty. Dionysius has Fabricius pontificate on the values of Roman society, which have afforded him honor and respect despite his lack of luxury.⁵⁵ The plunder that Fabricius gained in war as consul he used to enrich his soldiers and his community over himself, citing the early Republican hero Valerius Publicola as his model. Fabricius argues in favor of the communal good over the individual, whose greatest duty was to the *res publica*. Furthermore, Fabricius argued that Pyrrhus' offers of wealth came with a cost; they were essentially loans with the expectation of obedience that spoke of tyranny, not liberty. In a similar vein, Dio/Zonaras say that Fabricius told Pyrrhus that in fact it was he, as king, who was in extreme poverty despite all of his royal wealth.⁵⁶ Fabricius may not have had much, but as such he did not have a desire to grasp for more. Pyrrhus, on the other hand, was always striving for greater things, imperiling what he already had, an idea that echoes the earlier warnings of Cineas to the king while still in Epirus as they discussed the impending western campaign. When Fabricius ultimately refuses the 'gifts' of the king, it is a testament to the values that had made Rome great.

Thoroughly impressed, Pyrrhus tries other means of getting Fabricius on his side. Plutarch says that the king first tried to intimidate Fabricius.⁵⁷ He hid an elephant behind a curtain and when Fabricius was near the beast was suddenly revealed; it trumpeted and created a frightful image. The Roman was quite unimpressed and gave no outward reaction in the face of this unanticipated shock. This event mirrors one that Plutarch mentions also in his *Life of Alexander*, when the philosophers of India were quite unimpressed with the achievements of the conqueror so far from home.⁵⁸ Pyrrhus then invites him to dinner where Cineas proceeded to speak at length about the Epicurean preference for ease and comfort over politics. Fabricius replied, "O Heracles, let Pyrrhus and the Samnites hold to these beliefs while they are at war with us."⁵⁹ Fabricius demonstrates resolve in the face of the unexpected, finds strength in his own values, and looks upon Greek philosophy with disdain. Pyrrhus was impressed and asked Fabricius to join him as his companion after the war had been settled. The king was offering Fabricius a place of honor and wealth, as well as the opportunity for adventure. Fabricius replied that the king should be careful, lest the Epirotes preferred himself to Pyrrhus.⁶⁰ According to Eutropius, Pyrrhus said that it would be easier to shift the path of the sun than divert Fabricius from the path of honor.⁶¹

The next year, in 279, when Fabricius is erroneously said to be

consul, we are told that Pyrrhus' personal doctor approached Fabricius offering to poison the king before the battle of Ausculum. A Roman reader is left in a precarious position. Pyrrhus has already beaten the Romans at Heraclea and invaded Latium. The situation was grim and this was an opportunity to put an end to a significant threat. But Fabricius did not take the easy choice. Instead he rejected this shameful offer and chose to continue the fight in an honorable fashion, just as Laevinius had proposed in his exchanges with Pyrrhus before Heraclea. A contrast is constructed between the right but difficult thing to do and the wrong but easy thing. But for the reader, the choice was supposed to be clear. The Roman success of the early Republic was rooted in a strict adherence to principle. Fabricius' actions stand in contrast to the 'new wisdom' of intrigues and diplomatic maneuverings characteristic of Carthaginians and Greeks, which were increasingly common in the second century.⁶² Of course the Roman exploitation of local factionalism during and before the Pyrrhic War is ignored. Indeed, Fabricius' speech is the ultimate statement of the ideals of the early Republic and the climactic point in Dionysius' narrative. The Romans were facing their final challenge before their final conquests of Italy (which was already theirs by right if not in reality), and they succeeded thanks to their virtues. The reader's faith in Roman moral superiority is rewarded as the war began to turn against Pyrrhus.

But Fabricius was merely the individual who stood in for the Roman community as a whole. After he had failed to seduce Fabricius to his side, according to some sources Pyrrhus released his captured Roman prisoners to return home for the Saturnalia on the condition that they return to him if peace were not settled. The Roman soldiers returned home to their families, but the Senate, urged by Appius Claudius Caecus, rejected peace. Roman superiority was a major component of the speech of Appius. The Senate also decreed that any soldiers who refused to return were to be punished with death. The story itself closely resembles that of M. Atilius Regulus who was captured by the Carthaginians during the First Punic War and was supposedly sent by them as part of a diplomatic effort in the hopes that he would urge peace to save his own life.⁶³ Regulus instead urged a continuation of war, like Appius, and then chose to return with the Carthaginians since peace had not been made, and was brutally killed. Beyond the prisoners, Fabricius was virtuous in every way, but the same values that he epitomized were for the most part shared by the Roman people as a whole. It is Cineas, an opponent, who gave voice to this characterization, describing the Senate as a council of kings.

Roman moral superiority is reinforced by Pyrrhus himself, who can be found constantly praising his enemies. Fabricius symbolizes the

barbarization of the Greeks through his comments on tyranny which is a corruption of honorable monarchy according to Dionysius.⁶⁴ The Romans are taking up the mantle of Hellenism, which is their birthright in Dionysius' history. At the same time, there is a political maturity to the Romans that Pyrrhus cannot match.⁶⁵ We are told that Pyrrhus had come to recognize the strength of the Romans and as such to have regretted becoming involved in fighting them, blaming the duplicitous Tarentines for the war.⁶⁶ Pyrrhus becomes a figure that is not inherently bad; he is merely misguided. He was ignorant of the Romans prior to coming to Italy, but once he gained firsthand knowledge he came to respect them. Pyrrhus is made into another mouthpiece for Roman virtue, even in the midst of fighting them. But this is Roman fantasy meant to glorify the Roman past. When Pyrrhus decided to leave Italy after the battle of Ausculum, we are told that it was because he did not want to contend with what he now recognized as insurmountable Roman resolve and virtue. Pyrrhus himself embodies some of that Roman spirit, spurning gold in favor of arms when discussing the ransom of Roman prisoners.⁶⁷ The Romans had not yet been able to conquer Pyrrhus on the battlefield, but the values of their community are said to have overcome the king's desire to fight. The portrayal of Fabricius is meant to minimize Roman defeats and avoid dealing with reality.⁶⁸ Historically the events of 280 and 279 had not been kind to the Romans, but the subsequent Roman literary tradition found the roots of eventual victory in these exaggerated episodes of extraordinary deeds. The qualities of men like Fabricius are made to foretell Roman victory.

Notes

- 1 Plut. *Pyrr.* 16.3–4. Zonaras (8.3) offers little more, but gives a very pro-Roman slant to the exchange.
- 2 DH 19.9–10.
- 3 Bickerman (1947); *contra* Lévêque (1957) 319–321.
- 4 DH 19.13; Zon. 8.4; Justin 18.2.6–7; Stouder (2009); Lévêque (1957) 341–345. This mission is placed after Cineas' visit to Rome by Plutarch (*Pyrr.* 20) and Appian (*Samn.* 10.4); both imply further negotiations afterwards. Stouder (2009) 188–190 questions the idea of a ransom which she sees as abnormal and thus later invention. Ransoming of prisoners is not mentioned at all in the context of the wars of Italy before the third century, either by the Romans or those they fought. At the Caudine Forks (Livy 9.1–16; Oakley [1997–2005] 3:3–96), the Samnites released their Roman prisoners after humiliating them and seized their weapons and armor. These events resulted in the establishment of a peace of some sort (whether a *foedus* or *sponsio*). While far from the refined narrative of negotiation found in the Pyrrhic War, the Caudine Forks disaster does suggest releasing prisoners after battle in combination with peace negotiations was a possibility in Italian warfare.
- 5 Justin 18.1.6.

- 6 Dio fr. 40.31–2; Zon. 8.4; Lévêque (1957) 343.
- 7 DH 19.13.3.
- 8 Plut. *Pyrr.* 20.5; App. *Samn.* 10.5; cf. DH 20.6. Wuilleumier (1939) 128 rejects this episode as a later invention based on the connection with the Saturnalia being too precise.
- 9 Dio. fr. 40.23–25.
- 10 cf. Cic. *De Off.* 1.12.38; Lévêque (1957) 344.
- 11 Plut. *Pyrr.* 20; DH 19.14–18; Dio fr. 40.33–38; Zon. 8.4; Ennius *Ann.* fr. 186–193; App. *Samn.* 10.4.
- 12 Plut. *Pyrr.* 18.2; Zon. 8.4.
- 13 DH 15.5–10; Livy 8.22–23; Kent (2013).
- 14 Plut. *Pyrr.* 18; Zon. 8.4. Plutarch's narrative places Fabricius' mission after Cineas' visit to Rome, while Zonaras has Cineas use the already released prisoners as leverage. Zonaras does not explicitly mention immunity for the Tarentines, but implies it by having Pyrrhus assert that he came to Italy to settle their dispute with Rome.
- 15 App. *Samn.* 10.1; *FGrH* 839.
- 16 Polyae. 6.6.3.
- 17 Intrieri (1987–1988) 32–33.
- 18 Plut. *Pyrr.* 18.4; Zon. 8.4; App. *Samn.* 10.2.
- 19 Plut. *Pyrr.* 19; Zon. 8.4; App. *Samn.* 10.2; Eutrop. 2.13; *FGrH* 839.2. Cicero (*De Sen.* 6.16; cf. *Sen. Ep.* 19.5.13) claims that the speech was preserved intact to his own day, but it was likely a more recent composition, Lévêque (1957) 352; Skutsch (1985) 360–364.
- 20 Plut. *Pyrr.* 19.5; Justin 18.2.10–11; App. *Samn.* 10.3; Eutrop. 2.12.
- 21 As suggested by Wuilleumier (1939) 128. Popular background of the Claudii, Cornell (1995) 373–377; Staveley (1959); and of Fabricius, Lévêque (1957) 341.
- 22 Hoyos (2010) 43; Cornell (1995) 212.
- 23 Tagliamonte (1994). Etruscans aided the Athenian Sicilian Expedition, Thuc. 7.57.11. They also served in the armies of Agathocles against Carthage, DS 20.61.6; Justin 22.8.4–6.
- 24 The major source for these treaties is Polybius (3.22–25), but they are also referenced by Livy (7.27.2; 9.43.26; *Per.* 13) and Diodorus (16.69.1; 22.7.5). The chronology of the treaties is made difficult by contradictory and incomplete information, which has resulted in a great deal of debate, see Scardigli (1991); Oakley (1997–2005) 2:252–262; Scullard (*CAH*) vii.2:517–537; Walbank (1957–1971) 1:337–356.
- 25 Livy 7.38.2; Oakley (1997–2005) 2:359–360.
- 26 Some of the more recent arguments in support of the Philinus treaty are Serrati (2006); Scullard (*CAH*) vii.2:530–536; Huss (1985) 204–206; and Mitchell (1971), and those doubting its authenticity include Oakley (1997–2005) 2:258–262; and Hoyos (1985).
- 27 Livy *Per.* 14; 21.10.8; Zon. 8.8.3; Dio fr. 43.1; Oros. *Hist.* 4.5.2.
- 28 Scullard (*CAH*) vii.2:533.
- 29 Livy 9.43.26.
- 30 The renewal should be dated to late 279 or perhaps early 278, Hoyos (1984) 403–417; Mitchell (1971) 646–648; Lefkowitz (1959) 156–157; Lévêque (1957) 414; *contra* Nenci (1958) 275–285. Polybius (3.25.1–5) gives the terms of the renewal, which Livy (*Per.* 13; cf. DS 22.7.5) says occurred after Ausculum. Justin (18.2.1–3) and Valerius Maximus (3.7.10) describe the arrival of Mago's fleet in Rome, which Justin places after Ausculum in his somewhat confusing timeline.
- 31 “ἐὰν συμμαχίαν ποιῶνται πρὸς Πύρρον, ἐγγραπτον ποιεῖσθωσαν ἀμφοτέρωι,

ἵνα ἐξῇ βοηθεῖν ἀλλήλοις ἐν τῇ τῶν πολεμουμένων χώρᾳ; ὁπότεροι δ' ἂν χρεῖαν ἔχωσι τῆς βοηθείας, τὰ πλοῖα παρεχέτωσαν Καρχηδόνιοι καὶ εἰς τὴν ὁδὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐφοδὸν, τὰ δὲ ὁψώνια τοῖς αὐτῶν ἐκάτεροι. Καρχηδόνιοι δὲ καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν Ῥωμαίοις βοηθεῖτωσαν, ἂν χρεῖα ᾖ. τὰ δὲ πληρώματα μηδεὶς ἀναγκαζέτω ἐκβαίνειν ἀκουσίως." Plb. 3.25.3–5; trans. Hoyos (1984) 431.

- 32 It has been argued that πρὸς can also be taken as 'against', indicating a pact against Pyrrhus by Meister (1970) 415–416; Mitchell (1971) 650–651. However, nowhere in Greek does συμμαχία πρὸς mean 'an alliance against', and this translation creates problems with the subsequent portions of the agreement, Hoyos (1984) 420–432.
- 33 Hoyos (1984) 437–438.
- 34 Justin 18.2.1–3; Val. Max. 3.7.10.
- 35 Livy 36.4. Livy (36.44.5–7) describes Carthaginian ships taking part in a naval battle during the war. On the treaty, Plb. 15.18; Livy 30.37.1–6; Walbank (1957–1971), 2:466; Lazenby (1998), 228–232. Appian (*Pun.* 54) does say that the Carthaginians were to be Roman allies by land and sea, but does not indicate a specified obligation to provide ships on demand or some sort of schedule.
- 36 Passerini (1943) 100–101; Lévêque (1957) 412–414.
- 37 Scullard (*CAH*) vii.2:537.
- 38 Wuilleumier (1939) 125–131 rejects the idea of a second diplomatic mission, which Lefkowitz (1959) 160–161 follows with some reservation. Similarly, Passerini (1943) argues for a single diplomatic mission but instead places it in 278 during Fabricius' consulship. These arguments rely heavily on Justin's abbreviated and confused chronology. Lévêque (1957) 406–409 and Judeich (1926) 11–18 argue that there were two separate missions of some sort.
- 39 Plut. *Pyrr.* 21.1–4; Zon. 8.5; Gell. *NA* 3.8; Front. *Strat.* 4.4.2; Val. Max. 6.5.1; Florus 1.13.21; Livy *Per.* 14; Cic. *De Off.* 1.40, 3.86. Lévêque (1957) 406, and Wuilleumier (1939) 129, reject this story outright. The tale is very similar to that of Camillus and the teacher, Livy 5.27; Plut. *Cam.* 10; Mossman (2005) 506.
- 40 *MRR* 1:194.
- 41 App. *Samn.* 11.1.
- 42 Plut. *Pyrr.* 22.1; Justin 24.4–5. For events in Macedonia, see Hammond, et al. (1972–1988) 3:251–257.
- 43 App. *Samn.* 10.5.
- 44 Plut. *Pyrr.* 22.1–2.
- 45 Dio fr. 51.22; Brauer (1986) 144; Lévêque (1957) 332–333.
- 46 Brauer (1986) 144–145.
- 47 Justin 18.1.8–9; Zon. 8.6.
- 48 Plut. *Pyrr.* 16; App. *Samn.* 8; Zon. 8.2; Livy 23.7.5; see Lévêque (1957) 302.
- 49 Wuilleumier (1939) 112–113.
- 50 *contra* Lévêque (1957) 337.
- 51 Zon. 8.5; App. *Samn.* 11.1–2; Gell. *NA* 3.8.5.
- 52 *MRR* 1:189–194.
- 53 Cic. *Pro Cael.* 39; Horace *Od.* 1.12.40; Val. Max. 4.3.6. Regardless of later elaboration, Fabricius was celebrated immediately after his death, Stouder (2009) 191–194.
- 54 Plut. *Pyrr.* 20.1; DH 19.14.1; App. *Samn.* 10.4.
- 55 DH 19.15–16; cf. App. *Samn.* 10.4.
- 56 Dio fr. 40.35; Zon. 8.4.
- 57 Plut. *Pyrr.* 20.2.

- 58 Plut. *Alex.* 65; Mossman (2005) 505.
- 59 “Ὁ Ἡεράκλεις,” εἶπε, “Πύρρῳ τὰ δόγματα μέλοι ταῦτα καὶ Σαυνίταις, ἕως πολέμοῦσι πρὸς ἡμᾶς.” Plut. *Pyrr.* 20.4; cf. Eutrop. 2.12.
- 60 Plut. *Pyrr.* 20.4; App. *Samn.* 10.4.
- 61 Eutrop. 2.14.
- 62 Livy 42.47.
- 63 Lazenby (1996) 122.
- 64 Peirano (2010) 46–47.
- 65 Mossman (2005) 504.
- 66 Dio fr. 40.33; DH 19.14.4.
- 67 Ennius fr. 183–190; Barnes (2005) 24.
- 68 Corbier (2009) 230–231.

5 In Sicily

In 278, Pyrrhus' attention shifted to the island of Sicily and the long-running war between the Greeks and Carthaginians there. For ancient writers, this was simply an extension of his hubris, as he sought to conquer Sicily and Punic Africa since he was unable to overcome Roman fortitude. In reality, Pyrrhus had already obtained most of what he wanted in Italy. He was in firm control of the Italiote Greeks, which was bolstered by alliances with the Samnites, Lucanians, and Bruttians. An end to the war with Rome would have been desirable, but not immediately necessary. And so Pyrrhus now looked to bring the Sicilian Greeks under his control. War with the Carthaginians, like the Romans, was not the primary goal. The king was invited to Syracuse in order to deal with problems of political division and to provide assistance in case of a Carthaginian attack on the city. After establishing himself in Syracuse through deft political moves, Pyrrhus launched a methodical campaign against the Carthaginians that nearly drove them from the island. But he failed to understand the political complexities of Sicily and his attempts to expand his power over his allies resulted in widespread disaffection. The Sicilian Greeks were not interested in having a king, and the Carthaginians built on decades of experience, and took advantage of the cracks that began to form.

To Sicily (278 BCE)

The death of Agathocles in 289 once again saw the renewal of political turmoil in Syracuse and general division among the Sicilian Greeks. In several cities tyrants seized power. Like Agathocles before them, these tyrants attempted to establish their own hegemonies over other Greek cities, but they succeeded only in exacerbating the divisions between the *poleis*. Internal matters were little better. Men like Phintias, tyrant of Acragas, had greatly angered the people of his own city through brutal practices.¹ The Syracusans had seen some foreign success under their leader Hicetas but failed to accomplish anything lasting in the face of internal divisions. In addition, the Mamertines, Italian mercenaries formerly employed by Agathocles, seized strategically important Messana and began to raid those around

them, becoming a continual source of conflict in eastern Sicily.² The Carthaginians welcomed the chaos, which allowed them to greatly expand their own influence, deftly taking advantage of the factionalism within and between cities. In the face of Hicetas' limited successes, Carthaginian armies were dispatched to aid those he fought, resulting in two major defeats for the tyrant.³ Prominent cities such as Enna and Heraclea accepted Carthaginian garrisons, which served to increase their presence in the Greek areas of Sicily while also isolating powerful cities such as Acragas.⁴

Syracuse itself fell into *stasis*, with various oligarchic and democratic factions fighting for power.⁵ Prior to Pyrrhus' arrival, two men had risen to prominence. The first, Theonon, had managed to overthrow Hicetas and seize control of the fortified off-shore citadel called the Island. The other, Sosistratos, whipped up popular anger at the memory of Agathocles' tyranny, exiling many prominent men who he claimed were aiming at tyranny.⁶ By 279, Sosistratos controlled the city of Syracuse as well as Acragas, while Theonon held the Island. But neither was able to overpower the other, creating a political stalemate.⁷ The assistance of Pyrrhus was sought to settle these issues, as the Syracusans had earlier approached Timoleon.

Direct help for Syracuse from the other Sicilian Greeks was unlikely. They were weakened by internecine war, already under Carthaginian control, and/or fearful of a return of Syracusan domination. Like the Tarentines, the Syracusans had a long history of requesting foreign aid. A joint diplomatic mission was sent to Pyrrhus in Italy by both Sosistratos and Theonon.⁸ Plutarch says that in addition to Syracuse the envoys promised to bring Acragas and Leontini to the king as well. No doubt the envoys intended to impress Pyrrhus with the support he would immediately gain on the island, but it was also a carefully constructed façade. According to Diodorus, it was Sosistratos who controlled Acragas as well as some 30 other cities. Meanwhile the city of Leontini, ruled by the tyrant Heracleides, had been a subject ally of Syracuse since Agathocles' time.⁹ The request for Pyrrhus' aid represented only those cities within the Syracusan orbit, not the Sicilian Greeks as a whole. Syracusan promises of widespread support, as with the Tarentines before them, were less than they seemed.

As the Syracusan envoys asked Pyrrhus for help, the king struggled with what he should do. First was the possibility of taking control of Sicily and leading a successful war against Carthage, which promised significant increases in the king's wealth, military resources, and prestige. But shifting his theater of operations also threatened to expose his Italiote Greek allies to Roman attacks. The Romans had rejected Pyrrhus' attempts to make peace, and were campaigning in southern Italy against his Samnite and Lucanian allies. Second, the

throne of Macedonia was empty after the death of Ptolemy Ceraunus there.

The king, Plutarch says, railed against Fortune for presenting him with two opportunities at the same time (Sicily and Macedonia), forcing him to choose between the two.¹⁰ This indecision is built upon the anachronistic idea that Pyrrhus wanted to conquer all of the Italy, Sicily, and Libya, on top of Macedonia and Greece. A major theme of Plutarch's *Life* is the king's inability to pursue a single goal, instead changing directions as each new opportunity arises without finishing anything. The king's grandiose fantasies of glory to match Alexander continuously undercut everything he attempts. The chance of conquering either the west or the east is seemingly within reach, but not both. In classic Greek fashion Pyrrhus' greatest enemy is his own hubris, which is neatly paired with the humility of the Romans he faces. The Romans desired only to defend what was seen as theirs, Italy. But this image is of the constructed character of Pyrrhus whose motivations should not be assigned to the historical figure.

Pyrrhus' ultimate decision to go to Sicily was one based on practical strategic considerations. Operations in Sicily were probably already on his mind, albeit not as part of some grandiose scheme of conquest. Unification of the Italiote and Sicilian Greeks was a previously demonstrated reality to which Syracuse was a key component, even if the city's influence had waned since Agathocles' time. The king was in no better position to take Macedonia in 278 than he had been in 286; he needed to expand his resources to see his plans in mainland Greece come to fruition. Indeed, there is little reason to think that Pyrrhus had any widespread support in Macedonia; he was not invited to take the throne after Ptolemy Ceraunus' death, only informed by messengers that it was vacant.¹¹ Pyrrhus took a logical course of action considering both the immediate realities of his situation and with future plans in mind. This was not some half-cocked scheme to emulate Alexander. While peace with Rome would have been helpful, and no doubt what he desired before shifting operations to Sicily, Pyrrhus seized a significant opportunity to establish himself in Syracuse while the war in Italy was relatively quiet. As such, he dispatched his trusted advisor Cineas to begin diplomatic efforts among the Sicilian Greek cities.¹² Shortly thereafter, Pyrrhus left a garrison under his lieutenant Milo in Taras as well as other cities and moved towards Sicily.¹³

With the Syracusans now politically divided and with the threat of Pyrrhus' intervention, the Carthaginians followed up their earlier offensives with an attack on the city in 278. The potential interest of Pyrrhus in Sicily had already spurred the Carthaginians to renegotiate their treaty with the Romans involvement. The territory of the

Syracusans was devastated while a large army besieged the city and 100 ships blockaded the Great Harbor.¹⁴ They were able to count on aid from pro-Carthaginian elements in the city, but the walls of Syracuse were imposing and not easily assaulted. The Carthaginians settled in for a siege. There was small danger of the city falling quickly but the Syracusans were in a precarious position, making Pyrrhus' arrival that much more pressing.

For Pyrrhus, actually getting from Taras to Syracuse was not so simple, and Pyrrhus' enemies had little reason to make the passage easy. The mountains of Bruttium posed formidable obstacles, followed by the narrow straits between Rhegium and Messina. The Carthaginians were no doubt troubled by Pyrrhus' decision to shift operations, which threatened to disrupt their siege of Syracuse. As such, they made a concerted effort to prevent the king's crossing. The Bruttians were friendly to Pyrrhus, but the Romans had already installed a garrison in Rhegium on the Italian side of the straits. On the Sicilian side of the straits, the Carthaginians and Mamertines concluded an alliance between themselves.¹⁵ In addition, a fleet of some 30 Carthaginian ships patrolled the straits.¹⁶ Pyrrhus faced a difficult situation. He had around 60 warships, as well as transport vessels for his army.¹⁷ But unable to cross freely at the straits, Pyrrhus' fleet would be forced either to fight, risking defeat and significant losses to the military forces it was transporting, or to take a longer route further out to sea, risking attack in open water or natural disasters.

The king first moved his forces as close as he could, to Locri, a city on the eastern side of the toe of Italy that was the last friendly port he could expect on the peninsula. The problem of a friendly port in Sicily was solved when Tyndarion, tyrant of Tauromenium, offered to receive the king in his city some 25 miles south of Messina.¹⁸ Pyrrhus chose to risk the open water and crossed from Locri to Tauromenium, a distance of some 22 miles. The Carthaginians made no apparent effort to hamper him. Perhaps Pyrrhus snuck by at an opportune moment, as Timoleon had done before and Appius Claudius Caudex would later. Or, if the number of warships on both sides is accurate, the Carthaginians may have not wanted to risk a fight with Pyrrhus' larger fleet. Either way, Pyrrhus managed the crossing with no major difficulties despite the precautions of his enemies. Putting in first at Tauromenium, he then moved southwards towards Syracuse. Unwilling to get caught between the Syracusans inside the city and Pyrrhus' approaching army, the Carthaginians lifted their siege and blockade of Syracuse. They would focus on a defensive strategy to oppose the king. Pyrrhus entered the city triumphantly without fight. Many cities proceeded to send embassies, offering support apparently

beyond the initial Syracusan promises. The campaign was off to a good start, as had been the case in Italy.

The dominion of Pyrrhus

Pyrrhus entered Syracuse without a fight in late 278. The city was deeply divided in factional strife with which the king had to contend. He proceeded to reconcile the two men who had been vying for control of the city and had invited him to Sicily. Pyrrhus managed to settle the matter between Sosistratos and Theonon, which helped his political position in the city. He was able to present himself as a mediator and assert his superiority above the various factions of the city without being beholden to any one in particular.¹⁹ Once on the island, other cities, including Leontini, sent ambassadors.²⁰ Sosistratos also brought Acragas and other nearby small cities to the king, as promised. Pyrrhus then set about preparing for a campaign against the Carthaginians, but his legal position was poorly defined and his control nominal as he relied on voluntary support of his Sicilian allies just as he had in Italy.

Pyrrhus' familial relationships to Agathocles helped among some groups of Syracusan society but were problematic among others. Agathocles had given his daughter Lanassa to Pyrrhus (along with the island of Corcyra as dowry) to help secure his possessions in Magna Graecia long before Pyrrhus' own western campaign. She had provided Pyrrhus two sons, Alexander and Helenus, but was unable to accept the royal practice of polygamy used for political alliances and left him for Demetrius Poliorcetes. Diodorus mentions Lanassa as a motivating factor for the Syracusans.²¹ Agathocles had been popular among some of them. But the tyrant was not well liked by everyone as he represented a severe departure from the established political system and had employed brutal tactics against his enemies. After Agathocles' death Sosistratos had persecuted those who he claimed had supported the tyrant, seizing property and driving many into exile. Pyrrhus was forced to tread carefully if he was to avoid alienating powerful local leaders on every side as he had no deep-rooted support in the city. Pyrrhus likely emphasized his familial relations to those who were receptive and downplayed them to those who were hostile. As such, he decided that it would be best if his eldest son Alexander stayed in Italy to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Syracuse was under Pyrrhus' control and by extension subordinate cities such as Acragas and Leontini, but it was reliant on their voluntary support. Polybius, through a speech of Hieronymus during the Second Punic War, says that the Sicilians hailed Pyrrhus as hegemon and king (ἡγεμὼν καὶ βασιλεύς), and Justin says he was

called king of Sicily (*rex Siciliae*).²² Such language calls to mind Agathocles and later Hiero II, but these literary descriptions give a false impression of Pyrrhus' actual power.

In Italy Pyrrhus had not issued any coins in his own name, relying instead on local issues, some of which bore some of his iconography. During his time in Sicily, though, he issued a wide array of coins on a significant scale. Pyrrhus produced coinage that bore a variety of iconography that provide a window into his power on the island.²³ He used images typical of the kings of the Hellenistic east and associated with Alexander, such as the head of Zeus and his thunderbolt, which indicated the power of the monarch. Heracles was a particularly potent symbol for Pyrrhus. The demigod's exploits across the world were a parallel to the conquests of Alexander, and symbolized Greek superiority to the barbarian. Pyrrhus also claimed descent from Heracles, giving his leadership a divine power. Gold coins bore the image of Nike in an abstract form pioneered under Alexander, which symbolized a calling to conquer. Gold, silver, and bronze coins were issued in a variety of weights. On all of these issues, Pyrrhic/Epirote, Hellenistic, and Sicilian iconography was mixed.

Some of Pyrrhus' coins bear the inscription 'King Pyrrhus' (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΠΥΡΡΟΥ), but this does not necessarily indicate a claim of kingship over the Sicilian Greeks or Sicily as a whole. King Pyrrhus in this case does not equate to King of Sicily.²⁴ Indeed, his leadership differed greatly from those other kings as Pyrrhus relied on voluntary submission instead of military domination as they mostly had. Even as Pyrrhus issued coins in Syracuse, the city itself continued to produce coinage under its own authority. King (*basileus*) and hegemon in this instance most likely refer to the authority granted to him by the Sicilian Greeks in prosecuting a war with Carthage. His position was one that was built upon his individual leadership, which is emphasized in the iconography of his coins. Pyrrhus lacked any well-established connections in Syracuse that could have given him any ability to enforce a strong rule. Pyrrhus' familial ties to Agathocles were a double-edged sword at best and likely provided little basis for his rule. The factions of Syracuse supported Pyrrhus through necessity rather than any real connection.

The weight systems Pyrrhus employed were as varied as his iconography. Gold and silver coins conformed to the Attic standard, which was the basis for issues under Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic kingdoms. Bronze coins were minted on the local Sicilian Greek weight standard (*litra*). Pyrrhus also issued silver *octobols*, an unusual denomination in the Hellenistic period, which were similar in weight to Tarentine coins and reduced weight Corinthian *pegasi* that were common on the island. The primary purpose of Pyrrhus' coins

was to pay for his campaign. Whatever money he had brought from Epirus and made use of in Italy must have been running thin. The *octobols* served as a means of paying his men, who were drawn now from a wide geographic area that stretched from mainland Greece to Sicily, in a way that was somewhat compatible with a variety of weight standards.²⁵

Not only did Pyrrhus' coins serve a financial (paying for the campaign) and political (visually reinforcing his leadership) role, they also created the potential for a more unified monetary system. Coin weights in Italy, Sicily, and the western Mediterranean in general had lacked a universal standard, which made interchange an issue to some degree. As with Alexander the Molossian before him, Pyrrhus promoted the Attic standard while also integrating local weights within a more comprehensive system.²⁶ Whether this was a planned strategy or merely convenience, it facilitated interchangeability across the western Greek world that would foster a more unified economic area. This could, in time, strengthen Pyrrhus' own control of the region while stimulating trade. As with the Hellenistic kingdoms of the east, diverse populations required a flexible approach in order to create a more cohesive polity.

Pyrrhus' coins in Sicily were a marked departure from his time in Italy. Pyrrhus had not produced coins in Taras, Locri, or any other Italian city in his own name. A majority of the coins that were produced during his time in the west were minted in Sicily, with the mints of Italy producing far fewer.²⁷ To some degree, this increase is to be expected given the fact that his campaign was not stretching into a third year. But Syracuse itself was of monumental importance to any lasting hegemony in the west. The Tarentines proudly claimed leadership of the Italiote Greeks, but rarely managed to make that a reality, let alone have any influence in Sicily. The Syracusans, on the other hand, had at times managed to establish control over Sicily as well as southern Italy. Similarly, the Carthaginians were a far more established enemy of the Greeks than the Romans. Control of Taras was key to Pyrrhus' hegemony in southern Italy, but control of Syracuse created the potential for a Hellenistic-style kingdom. Pyrrhus' coins clearly indicate the king's intentions in the long run, but also the limitations of his authority upon his arrival.

Pyrrhus' authority and military power was dependent on his local allies who made up most of his soldiers, since only a core of some 8,000 men had come with him from Italy. The support of men like Sosistratos and Theonon was far more relevant than his own family connections. So too Pyrrhus relied on other *poleis* voluntarily allying with him. His coins indicate a limitation of his actual power and retention of local autonomy. His position relied on his ability to unite

aided by his reputation as a victor, an image he promoted through the iconography of his coins. The subsequent campaign against the Carthaginians in 277 would have greatly strengthened Pyrrhus' hand, but there was still a fundamental flaw in his exercise of power. Pyrrhus lacked effective agency among his allies. He was forced to rely on others, which meant that if their support was withdrawn he had few options to assert himself. The king may have had dreams of greater influence, but he had to tread very carefully to avoid alienating his support.

The military forces of the Carthaginians and Pyrrhus

The Carthaginians maintained significant military and naval forces in Sicily. Carthaginian armies were large, well organized, and served a key function in their wars against the Greeks on Sicily, but our knowledge of these conflicts is limited to Greek sources that portray Carthaginian armies as large, poorly organized, poorly led, and prone to dissolving at the first setback. Nevertheless, Carthaginian forces had managed to deal serious defeats to their Greek opponents at times and were certainly capable enough to pursue offensive campaigns or defend against Greek attacks as circumstances dictated. Very little is preserved concerning the specific makeup or activities of Carthaginian armies in the Pyrrhic War, but a general outline can be established.

Carthage's land forces were drawn from three pools of manpower: the citizens of Carthage itself, who sometimes formed Sacred Battalions, the Libyphoenician population surrounding the city, and mercenaries drawn from around the western Mediterranean.²⁸ It is the use of mercenaries drawn from Gaul, Spain, Numidia, Italy, and other places that are negatively emphasized by Greco-Roman sources. Nevertheless, mercenaries were often professionals (as opposed to Greek or Roman militia) who rarely betrayed their employers save only when pay was not forthcoming.²⁹ Mercenaries were skilled and effective, and no problems with them are mentioned in the Pyrrhic War.

Carthaginian armies were diverse in their makeup, which allowed for a great deal of flexibility through an assorted mixture of different infantry, cavalry, and light infantry. (Elephants were not yet used by the Carthaginians.) How these armies were organized is not known in any detail, although no doubt a system of units and officers was in place to coordinate the men in battle. A large Carthaginian army could number between 20,000 to perhaps 60,000. Unfortunately, reliable numbers are hard to come by as Greek and Roman sources

enjoyed exaggerating their enemies' numbers to glorify their own victories. At times they describe ridiculous-sized armies of 120,000 to 300,000 men and casualties of 150,000 in a single battle.³⁰ But the lack of unbiased data makes it difficult to offer little more than conjecture with regards to numbers for most campaigns and battles before the Punic Wars.

The Carthaginians were the preeminent naval power of the western Mediterranean. By the time of the Pyrrhic War, the quinquereme had become the foremost warship although triremes were still commonly used as well. The quinquereme was a long, slender ship with a crew of around 300 (mostly working the oars) designed for ramming enemy vessels.³¹ The Carthaginian ships were well designed and the crews skilled, often proving more than a match for Greek navies in battle. Although the total number of ships in service during the Pyrrhic War is not mentioned, Carthaginian fleets in total seem to have numbered between 200 and 300 ships, which would have required tens of thousands of men. Most of the crews were drawn from Carthaginian citizens. Carthage's navy was formidable and played a key role in supporting military efforts in Sicily, raiding, protecting supply lines, and moving soldiers.

The Carthaginians were capable of fielding large and capable military and naval forces when Pyrrhus began his campaign. We are told that an army of 50,000 men and 100 ships was besieging Syracuse in 278.³² Whatever the precise number, a substantial amount would have been needed to lay siege to the city. Once the king arrived, these forces withdrew and disappear from the surviving narrative. During Pyrrhus' march across the island in 277, no Carthaginian army would oppose him on the battlefield and no naval operations are recorded by either side. The pro-Greek sources create an image of weakness and cowardice in the face of an awe-inspiring Pyrrhus.

However, instead of challenging Pyrrhus in the field where they faced a skilled general, Carthaginian commanders chose a defensive strategy relying on a series of fortified cities and bastions scattered throughout the western areas of the island. The most important city was Lilybaeum located at the western tip of Sicily, which served as the basis of Carthaginian power. Each of these sites was well fortified against attack, which the Carthaginians expected to bring any efforts by Pyrrhus to a grinding halt. Likewise, control of the sea by their navy would force Pyrrhus to make a series of bloody assaults as he would be unable to starve out the garrisons in coastal sites. The Carthaginians would later pursue similar tactics during the First Punic War in the face of Roman invasion. Such a defensive strategy would be supplemented with a series of targeted diplomatic strikes meant to

sow division between Pyrrhus and his allies. However, the Carthaginians failed to anticipate Pyrrhus' ability as he pushed their strategy to its limits.

The precise number of soldiers Pyrrhus transported from Italy to Sicily is difficult to determine due to incomplete information in the sources. Appian says he crossed with his elephants and 8,000 men, probably a mixture of cavalry and infantry, a number reinforced by Pyrrhus' coin production.³³ (The king left a similar-sized force sans elephants in Italy under his lieutenant Milo to protect his possessions there during his time away.) These 8,000 men formed the core of his army in Sicily, which would have been mostly those who had come with him from Epirus to Italy including his phalanx of Epirotes. Pyrrhus had been unable to draw any more men from Epirus as reinforcements.³⁴ No Italian allies are mentioned as crossing with him or in the subsequent campaigns, which may be the result of fragmentary sources or the fact that the Samnites, Lucanians, and Italiote Greeks were defending against Roman incursions into southern Italy.

Pyrrhus was forced to rely on his Sicilian Greek allies to provide him the manpower needed to face the Carthaginians. The king was supported by men sent by the leaders of Syracuse (10,000 men), Leontini (4,000 infantry, 500 cavalry), and Acragas (8,000 infantry, 800 cavalry).³⁵ No doubt other Greeks and perhaps some Sicels sent men as well, but they were either not seen as relevant or were too few to warrant mention in the surviving sources. In total, Pyrrhus entered the Carthaginian *epikrateia* with around 30,000 infantry, between 1,500 and 2,500 cavalry, and his elephants.³⁶ A majority of his soldiers were Sicilian Greeks, making him especially dependent on their continued goodwill. In the various sieges of the campaign the army proved very effective in difficult assaults against the walls of Eryx and Panormus, suggesting Pyrrhus led a capable military force.

Once he took control of Syracuse, Pyrrhus also controlled a rather large fleet of over 200 warships, made up mostly of quinqueremes.³⁷ These were, like his army, mostly provided by his allies. The largest of these ships was a royal 'niner' (ἐννήρης). However, Pyrrhus' navy never saw any action. This absence, combined with his efforts to build more ships in 276, suggest that the Greek navy was inferior to that of Carthage making the king wary of losing his own ships. As such, Pyrrhus' naval forces would not play a significant role in the war beyond ferrying him to and from Sicily.

The campaign in Sicily (277 BCE)

Pyrrhus had crossed into Sicily in the late summer of 278, moving

down the eastern coast of the island until he reached Syracuse. From there, he began preparations for a campaign against the Carthaginians, including the minting of coins to pay for it. This operation would be drastically different from what had occurred in Italy. There would be no major battles. Instead, it was a methodical series of bloody sieges of fortified cities and locations. Pyrrhus set out from Syracuse at the head of an army of around 32,000 men in the spring of 277. His campaign was carefully planned and informed by his experienced Sicilian Greek allies. The linchpin to Carthage's position was Lilybaeum far to the west. But Pyrrhus had to isolate the city before he could launch a major attack on it. The Carthaginians, on the other hand, countered Pyrrhus' efforts through a combination of a defensive military strategy and an offensive diplomatic effort.

As in Italy, there was no way for Pyrrhus to root out every garrison or conquer every town in alliance with his enemies, which would be a slow effort exposed to counterattacks. As such, he pursued a similar strategy of gathering local alliances as he had in Italy, but with greater success in Sicily than he had seen there. The tyrants of Tauromenium and Leontini had already provided soldiers. Soon after the campaign began the centrally located city of Enna sought an alliance, followed by several western cities as Pyrrhus moved into Carthaginian territory.³⁸ Where many central Italian communities chose to remain allies of the Romans, Sicilian communities were proving more amenable. This process is not unexpected, as influence in various cities and regions of the island had changed repeatedly between the Carthaginians and Greeks over the previous decades as the power of each side had waxed and waned. For many communities, an alliance with Pyrrhus was simply the most pragmatic choice in a mercurial political and military environment. Of course, this also meant that their loyalty to Pyrrhus was equally dubious. Unlike in Italy, in Sicily Pyrrhus was able to take control of city after city, peacefully and by siege, resulting in a real perception of momentum in driving the Carthaginians from the island. Where the Romans had lost little territory to the king, the Carthaginians were being steadily pushed back.

Pyrrhus marched west from Syracuse towards the large city of Acragas halfway along the southern coast of Sicily, probably along the road from Catana. Acragas had been under the control of Sosistratos. Once Pyrrhus arrived he took control of its military forces and dependent communities.³⁹ From here, he could march deep into the heart of Carthaginian territory to the west with a secure base of operations and supply lines. Pyrrhus then moved west along the coastal road, taking control of Heracleia, a city about 15 miles west of Acragas, and Azones.⁴⁰ Whether these cities required a siege or were

taken by some other means is not mentioned, although Heracleia did have a Carthaginian garrison. As he continued west, the peoples of Selinus, Halicyae, Segesta and others joined voluntarily.⁴¹ These cities were situated in the foothills overlooking the plain in which Lilybaeum was located, and were well placed to cut the city off from the interior while simultaneously supplying Pyrrhus' army during a siege.

However, Pyrrhus could not assault Lilybaeum quite yet. The Carthaginians still held Eryx, a fortified site about 18 miles north of the city, and Panormus, a strategic city on the northern coast. From both positions, the Carthaginians could threaten not only a besieging force at Lilybaeum but also Pyrrhus' holdings in the interior. They could also disrupt his supply lines.

Eryx was located on the mountain of the same name, which was well fortified and overlooked the nearby port of Drepana. The mountain was tall with a flat summit, on which stood a temple to Astarte below which the city was located.⁴² The approach to the town was steep and difficult. Later, in the First Punic War, Hamilcar Barca held the site for two years against Roman attacks.⁴³ Pyrrhus found the city protected by walls and a strong Carthaginian garrison, which supplemented the natural defenses of the site. Unable to convince the city to join him, no doubt due to the presence of the garrison and proximity to Lilybaeum, Pyrrhus decided upon an assault. He brought up siege engines against the walls, but the attack dragged on until Pyrrhus personally led the assault. Diodorus says that Pyrrhus sought to emulate Heracles, and Plutarch says that he vowed games to the demigod if victorious.⁴⁴ Plutarch then describes a spectacular scene (echoed in a much more truncated form by Diodorus) in which Pyrrhus is said to have donned his armor, ordered the trumpets sounded and the ladders brought up, and then was the first to top the walls. The king then proceeded to kill many of the defenders personally, either with his sword or shoving them off the walls. Pyrrhus was victorious and, amazingly, suffered no wounds in his heroism. He then held the games he had promised and garrisoned Eryx.

The image of Pyrrhus at Eryx is spectacular and clearly meant to evoke the deeds of great heroes. Pyrrhus' imitation of Heracles reinforced his claims of descent from the hero, while simultaneously showing himself to be a worthy champion of the Sicilian Greeks.⁴⁵ Plutarch strengthens these connections by referencing a line from Homer's *Iliad*, again invoking heroic imagery but also obliquely making a connection to Alexander the Great. Alexander venerated the *Iliad* and Achilles in particular, he emulated Heracles from whom it was said he was descended, and also personally stormed the walls of

the Malloi in the face of a difficult siege.⁴⁶ (This action did not go as well for Alexander. His men broke the ladders in their haste to support him and, after jumping down into the city, he was severely wounded.) The siege of Eryx is a scene crafted to invoke these parallels to build up Pyrrhus' own image. Pyrrhus may well have personally participated in the final assault into the city. Like his cousin he certainly did not shy from combat. But the embellishments of the surviving narratives cannot be accepted at face value. At the same time, this moment of triumphal glory presages Pyrrhus' imminent fall. This was the peak of his efforts in the west, aided by a magnificent display of personal heroism. But he would soon fail to take Lilybaeum and the Sicilian Greeks would begin to turn against him, creating, as portrayed in the Roman narrative, a domino effect of collapse. So too Alexander's siege of the Malloi, where he was wounded, represents the beginning of the end of his campaign. The reader is meant to recognize that no matter the accomplishments of great men, there is a limit to what can be accomplished alone. The collective might of Rome would succeed where Pyrrhus failed.

Despite this narrative foreshadowing, Pyrrhus' campaign did continue. Once Eryx was taken, he moved against Panormus to the east. The city of Iaetia, just to the south, served as a useful base from which to attack the city.⁴⁷ Panormus commanded a spectacular harbor, from which it derived its Greek name, and was one of the largest cities on the island. As with Eryx, the Carthaginian garrison forced Pyrrhus to take the city by storm. Once it was secured the king then seized Mt. Hierkte, a fortified site that overlooked the city.⁴⁸ Having taken control of the most important strategic sites in western Sicily, Pyrrhus could finally move against Lilybaeum itself.

Throughout Pyrrhus' methodical campaign, the sources are remarkably silent about what the Carthaginians were doing to oppose him. The only mention of Carthaginian military forces is garrisons. To some degree it is not surprising that Greek sources would minimize their activities, and the survival bias of sources should be taken into account. But the supposed 50,000 men that had besieged Syracuse the previous year are markedly missing. Perhaps they were withdrawn back to Lilybaeum or scattered to serve as garrisons. There can be little doubt that Carthaginian commanders orchestrated some sort of counterattacks as well as harassing actions against Pyrrhus, which have fallen out of the surviving narrative. But just as clearly, the Carthaginians were focused on a defensive strategy.⁴⁹ Such a stance was reasonable enough, as similar Greek gains in previous wars had been ephemeral. Carthaginian commanders may have been looking beyond the immediate campaign, planning to maintain control of strategic sites in the face of the campaign of 277 before

counterattacking when Pyrrhus withdrew back east. However, Pyrrhus' aggressiveness combined with his quick successes likely came as a surprise. Whatever the Carthaginians were doing militarily, their efforts did little to slow the king's advance. Whoever was in overall command of Carthaginian forces was unwilling to take the risk of battle. The harsh punishments meted out to unsuccessful Carthaginian commanders would have reinforced a cautious approach.

But armies were not the only ways that the Carthaginians contended with the Greeks. In addition to their military efforts, the Carthaginians also pursued diplomatic means of halting Pyrrhus and preserving something of their Sicilian holdings. However, these efforts are tainted with Roman bias influenced by their own subsequent conflicts with the Carthaginians. As with Mago's mission in Italy, the Carthaginians here are depicted as duplicitous and back-stabbing. During Pyrrhus' preparations to lay siege to Lilybaeum, the Carthaginians sent envoys to meet with the king.⁵⁰ They offered him money in exchange for retention of their last stronghold on Sicily. Plutarch also mentions that they offered him ships, which could logically only have been useful against the Romans and would have violated their treaty terms.⁵¹ However, Plutarch's narrative of the end of the campaign suffers from a literary reshaping of events to reinforce Pyrrhus' failings and the 'Punic faith' of the Carthaginians. A negotiated end to the war would have been in Carthage's advantage and it would not be surprising if money was offered as part of the deal. But there is no reason to believe that they offered him ships or were actively conspiring against the Romans. They simply did not need to incite war; the Romans were already attacking the king's Italian allies. Events in Italy would pull Pyrrhus' attention there before long, opening the door for Carthaginian resurgence in Sicily.

Pyrrhus was urged by some of his advisors to accept the Carthaginian offer, which would effectively end the war on the island with the Greeks in control of most of it. However, his friends and the leaders of the Sicilian Greeks insisted that he press on and seize Lilybaeum in order to drive the Carthaginians completely from the island. They feared that the city would serve as a foothold for renewed Carthaginian efforts in the future; a point of view no doubt influenced by decades of back-and-forth wars. According to Diodorus, they claimed that the sea would be a much more effective boundary, an idea that Plutarch has Pyrrhus voice. It would have only been a matter of time before the Carthaginians betrayed the peace, in their mind. Alexander the Great's own refusal to accept the peace offered by king Darius comes to mind.⁵² Alexander refused Darius' offers of money, land, and alliance in the face of his own unparalleled accomplishments. The Macedonian king had subsequently gone on to

conquer all of the Persian Empire. For Pyrrhus, driving the Carthaginians off Sicily was a real possibility. His successes, combined with the advice he received, all but precluded his acceptance of the Carthaginian offer. But Pyrrhus was no Alexander.

Having rejected the offer of peace, Pyrrhus laid siege to Lilybaeum in the fall of 277 or perhaps early 276.⁵³ The city was the linchpin of Carthaginian territory on Sicily and Pyrrhus had by now managed to isolate it. However, the Carthaginian negotiations had allowed time enough to place more troops in the city and prepare its fortifications for assault.⁵⁴ The garrison also prepared and massed missile throwers on the tops of the walls. The size of the Carthaginian forces are not mentioned, but were substantial and able to effectively defend the city. Pyrrhus had few options. Starving Lilybaeum out was impractical as the garrison could be resupplied from the sea thanks to the Carthaginian navy. An assault was necessary. Pyrrhus brought up siege equipment from Syracuse and constructed more on site. He launched assaults on the walls while also attempting to undermine them. But the Carthaginian defenders countered these efforts and inflicted heavy casualties. It is interesting to note that Pyrrhus' personal heroics displayed at Eryx were not repeated in this more difficult attack. Aggression and daring, which had seen such success against other Carthaginian sites, were not effective here. The defenses of the city proved insurmountable, forcing Pyrrhus to break off his efforts.

The events surrounding the siege of Lilybaeum are shaped in such a way as to foreshadow the collapse of Pyrrhus' efforts. It is here that the ancient writers reiterate Pyrrhus' supposed goals to not only conquer Sicily, but also Carthage itself in Africa. During Carthage's diplomatic mission, Pyrrhus is found espousing his desire to conquer Libya, as he had told Cineas before crossing to Italy. Pyrrhus is at his greatest power, having beaten the Romans in battle, won over the western Greeks, personally assaulted Eryx, and nearly driven the Carthaginians from Sicily. His hubris is also at its maximum, anticipating the imminent arrival of nemesis. The supposed desire to invade Africa echoes the invasions of Agathocles earlier in 310 and M. Atilius Regulus later in 256. Both of those campaigns, the reader knows, ended in failure. Agathocles barely managed to escape and had been forced to leave his army behind, while Regulus ultimately perished with his men. Pyrrhus is portrayed as striving for the impossible. Throughout the *Life of Pyrrhus* Plutarch emphasizes Pyrrhus' lofty and unrealistic intentions, and it is here that things begin to spin out of control. The decision to risk what has already been gained in the hope of gaining more is a foolish act by a man unable to perceive of his own limitations. It is a morality play.

As with his campaign in Italy, Pyrrhus' goals in Sicily were more limited than Plutarch and others insist. Pyrrhus conducted a systematic and well-planned operation aimed at isolating Lilybaeum before launching a final assault on the city, which would have all but ended Carthaginian influence in Sicily. Establishing the sea as a boundary was a logical goal, as opposed to the conquest of Carthage itself. To suddenly take such a massive risk by invading Africa was out of character for Pyrrhus based on the pragmatic actions he had taken up to this point. The failure at Lilybaeum was certainly a setback, but hardly catastrophic since Pyrrhus maintained control of large swaths of the island and he could always try again. His Sicilian alliances would have been further cemented by the impressive scope of his success even without taking the city. The invasion of Africa should be set aside as literary fantasy.

Because Plutarch was more interested in his portrayal of Pyrrhus' character, his chronology for the end of the campaign is vague. After the heroics at Eryx but before the Carthaginian peace proposal and subsequent siege of Lilybaeum, he mentions a campaign against the Mamertines in which Pyrrhus seized several cities and ended raiding by the former mercenaries.⁵⁵ But there hardly seems time for such an action during the campaigning season of 277 alongside the rest of the campaign. Messina sits at the far northeastern tip of the island, more than 120 miles from Panormus and 175 miles from Lilybaeum through mountainous terrain. As such, it is possible that the attack on Lilybaeum occurred in early 276. This would also allow for some time for the negotiations between the Carthaginians and Pyrrhus. The king's successive attempts to expand his fleet and consolidate his power in Syracuse would then take place sometime in the late summer. It is also possible that the campaign against the Mamertines is out of place and that it took place in 276, while the siege of Lilybaeum was part of the campaign the previous year. Unfortunately Plutarch's narrative does not allow for a definitive statement on the course of events. No other sources mention a campaign against the Mamertines. Whatever the exact timing, the Mamertines retreated in the face of Pyrrhus' attacks.

Despite the disappointment at Lilybaeum, Pyrrhus had seen great success. He had marched a circuit around the island, subduing nearly the entirety of it. He now controlled southern Italy and most of Sicily. Triumphant, Pyrrhus sought to use this success as a foundation for expanding his own power over his allies.

Consolidation and collapse (276 BCE)

After his campaign in 277, Pyrrhus was in a strong position in Sicily

with regards to both his allies and enemies. Plutarch and Appian assert that now Pyrrhus planned to conquer the city of Carthage in Africa, fulfilling the statements he had made to Cineas upon being invited to Italy.⁵⁶ Pyrrhus began to gather more ships, more sailors to man them, and more money to pay for it all from his Sicilian allies, putting a great deal of pressure on them to meet his demands. But the conquest of Carthage itself was unrealistic. Invading Africa was a massive gamble that threatened to undermine Pyrrhus' control of Sicily. Agathocles' own invasion would have served as a tale of warning, not encouragement. These efforts should instead be seen as linked to his efforts against the still Carthaginian-held Lilybaeum. Pyrrhus was preparing for a final push to drive the Carthaginians from their last stronghold in Sicily. Without the city Carthaginian power on the island would have been all but eliminated, giving Pyrrhus control of all of the island's resources.

Taking Lilybaeum would require not only a siege from land, but a blockade from the sea to cut off supplies and reinforcements. Even then, the effort would be extremely difficult as the Romans would later find out in their own failed attempt at it.⁵⁷ Such an effort would require a considerable fleet. He already commanded some 200 warships, but they would be hard pressed to take on the large Carthaginian navy and still provide some protection to Sicily from raiding elsewhere. As such, the king began gathering money, ships, and men, making heavy demands of the Sicilian Greeks.⁵⁸ With a fleet to complement his army, Pyrrhus could reasonably expect to drive the Carthaginians from Lilybaeum, secure his domination of Sicily, and then be able to turn his attention elsewhere with the island's resources at his beck and call.

Pyrrhus also began to consolidate his authority over the Sicilian Greeks. His hegemony was fragile, but his success against the Carthaginians seemed to give new opportunities to expand his power. In particular, this meant establishing a firmer base of support in Syracuse. It is Dionysius who sheds light on the king's actions.⁵⁹ Pyrrhus seized land that had belonged to the friends and family of Agathocles, reassigning it to his friends. He placed his own men in magisterial positions in several cities, as well as garrisons. And he increasingly inserted himself in deciding judicial cases and civil administration. Justin says that Pyrrhus was organizing Sicily as a kingdom for his son Alexander (and Italy for Helenus).⁶⁰ Pyrrhus envisioned maintaining long-term control of the Sicilian Greeks, much to the chagrin of those that had invited him there. This dynastic system would maintain his authority even after he had returned to Epirus and Greece.

Pyrrhus' increasing assertion of his own power is also seen in the

bronze coins issued during his time in Sicily.⁶¹ When the king had first arrived, Pyrrhus' presence is secondary while Syracusan iconography remains dominant. The final issue, bearing the head of Heracles and Athena Promachos, is heavily indicative of Pyrrhus' imagery. Pyrrhus' ambitions were reflected here as with his actions in the political sphere. But these coins also indicate the financial pressure being placed on Syracuse in funding the campaign against the Carthaginians. Over time the bronze issues decrease in weight, a pattern that would be reflected in the coins produced in Taras and southern Italy after Pyrrhus' return there. Prosecution of the war was coming at the cost of its political autonomy and financial stability.

Pyrrhus' success had created the opportunity to truly unite Sicily under a system of amalgamated leadership with himself at its head. But the Sicilian Greeks in general and the Syracusans in particular were not so keen on having a strong king. Many had resented the leadership and power of the Dionysii and Agathocles before him. Within the city the leadership of Syracuse had long been divided into competing factions, whom Pyrrhus had deftly risen above. But this also meant that he had no single group that he could count on for support. Other leaders who had been invited to Sicily had faced similar challenges. Unlike Pyrrhus, Agathocles had been a Sicilian with strong roots in Syracuse and had forged strong support among various factions within the city over the course of years that allowed him to make heavy exactions when he seized power. Pyrrhus was not established well enough to push his leadership as far as he attempted. Furthermore, he had little interest in actually remaining in Syracuse or Sicily, instead desiring the resources of the island for his plans in the Hellenistic east.

Conspiracies sprouted amongst the Sicilian Greeks with the most significant led by Sosistratos and Theonon, men who had been instrumental in inviting Pyrrhus to the island.⁶² What exactly they were up to is left intentionally unclear. Dionysius specifically calls Pyrrhus' subsequent allegations of conspiracy false while Plutarch prefers to merely imply such. Both authors use these events to emphasize the king's growing despotism. Dio manages to denigrate both Pyrrhus as well as the Sicilian Greeks. Sosistratos got wind of Pyrrhus' suspicions and slipped out of the city ahead of the headsman's axe, perhaps finding refuge in Acragas. Theonon, whom Dionysius is careful to point out was one of Pyrrhus' strongest early supporters, was not so lucky and was executed. The king's efforts are similar to those of Alexander after he had defeated Darius, attempting to force the Macedonians and Greeks to obey him like an eastern despot. This desire for personal power poisoned the efforts of both Pyrrhus and Alexander in the moral narratives of later writers.

With Pyrrhus taking more direct control, it is hardly surprising that these two prominent men would be involved in the growing Syracusan disaffection. For Pyrrhus, they represented the most powerful individuals who could potentially stand in his way, and their elimination should be seen as in line with his efforts to place his own people in leadership positions. His leadership was made even more precarious by the fact that a majority of his military forces were Sicilian Greeks, with Sosistratos providing nearly a third of those he had led against the Carthaginians. Some men, of course, found new opportunities. Hiero, the future king of Syracuse, earned a number of military awards from the king.⁶³ But whatever support Pyrrhus found among these local leaders, it was insufficient. As he tightened his grip, the political and military situation slipped from his control.

Once again capitalizing on Greek division, and perhaps seeking to avoid a second siege of Lilybaeum, the Carthaginians went on the offensive both militarily and diplomatically.⁶⁴ Reinforcements arrived from Africa and Italy, supplementing whatever was left of the army that had besieged Syracuse the year before. The army then advanced eastward, rolling back some of Pyrrhus' gains. The Carthaginians also provided refuge to Greek refugees driven out by Pyrrhus' consolidation of power, as they had done with those who had opposed Agathocles before. These exiles served as a means of further undermining Pyrrhus and facilitating Carthaginian diplomatic efforts, which saw success among both Greeks and native Sicels. The Mamertines also took the opportunity to launch offenses in alliance with the Carthaginians. This counterattack undermined the chief claim to leadership Pyrrhus had: his military reputation. Now the king was on the defensive with fewer soldiers at his command to stabilize the situation.

Pyrrhus' position was becoming precarious on every front. According to the sources, it was at this critical moment that Pyrrhus' Italiote Greek and Samnite allies called for his immediate assistance in the face of Roman aggression.⁶⁵ The situation in Italy was deteriorating as it was in Sicily, and Pyrrhus must have known that it was impossible for him to attempt to hold both against concerted attacks. No doubt this was why he had tried to push the Romans into a peace after defeating them in battle and precisely why the Carthaginians had worked so hard to prevent it. Of course this situation duplicates the king's prior quandary about going to Sicily, once again serving as an example of Pyrrhus' wild attempts to pursue whatever goal seems easiest while failing to follow through on any of them. But Pyrrhus' position in Sicily was increasingly untenable in the face of Carthaginian military and diplomatic aggression in combination along with the backlash amongst many of his Sicilian

Greek allies.

Pyrrhus had failed to grasp the complexities of the situation in Sicily as Greek political division, especially within Syracuse, and Carthaginian counterattacks undermined his efforts. Pyrrhus had deftly managed to establish himself as leader in Syracuse, city, but in that position his control was delicate. When he attempted to remedy the situation following his successful campaign against the Carthaginians, he found what support he had melting away.

While Pyrrhus was losing control in this tumultuous political environment, the Carthaginians took advantage based on decades of experience in diplomatic manipulation. The Carthaginians were not, in fact, passive players against Pyrrhus. They pursued a defensive strategy in 277 in the face of the combined forces of the Sicilian Greeks behind Pyrrhus, holding Lilybaeum in preparation for renewed efforts later. And when cracks began to show in 276 and the Greeks were increasingly unhappy with Pyrrhus' exactions, the Carthaginians went on the offensive. As Plutarch noted, Pyrrhus was forced to leave the island because "he could not master Sicily which was like a chaotic ship ..."66 The Carthaginians understood this chaos, capitalized upon it, and drove the king into retreat.67

For Pyrrhus, strengthening his control in Sicily was conceivable, but promised to be a long and difficult task with no guarantee of success. The more time he spent in Sicily, the less he would be able to pursue his goals in Italy and the Hellenistic east. As he lost influence among the Sicilian Greeks, his military forces were put in greater danger.68 He also risked being stranded in Sicily as the Romans had gained control of Locri, Croton, and Heraclea along the southern coast of Italy, which, in combination with Rhegium, effectively severed Pyrrhus' allies in Italy and Sicily. With Carthaginian naval forces still patrolling the straits, leaving the island was becoming more and more difficult. In the end, there really was no choice; Pyrrhus decided to abandon Sicily. Before he left he may have defeated a Carthaginian army in one last fight, but it was a parting shot.69 No doubt those communities in the interior of the island that had so readily joined Pyrrhus at the height of his success now switched sides again as his hegemony collapsed. The various peoples of Sicily had resisted Pyrrhus' attempts to create a more unified state under his control. The king had been unable to assert control over the contested political and military environment of the island.

Notes

1 DS 22.2.

2 DS 21.18; Dio fr. 40.8. The Mamertines (sons of Mamers, the Oscan Mars) were

said to have slaughtered the Greek male population of the city, seizing the women for themselves. Similarly, in 404 a group of Campanian mercenaries had seized Entella in Sicily, DS 14.9.9. Concerning Italian mercenaries in Sicily see Tagliamonte (1994).

- 3 DS 21.18.1, 22.2.1.
- 4 DS 22.10.1–2; Justin 23.2.13.
- 5 DS 21.18; Justin 23.2; Lévêque (1957) 452–455.
- 6 Polyae. 5.37; DS 19.3–5.
- 7 DS 22.6.2, 7.6.
- 8 Plut. *Pyrr.* 22; DS 22.7.3; DH 20.8.1; Justin 18.2.11. It is unlikely that there had been previous diplomatic overtures, despite Diodorus' statement that Theonon and Sosistratos 'once more' (πάλιν) invited Pyrrhus to Sicily, Hamburger (1927) 77.
- 9 Berger (1991) 140–141.
- 10 πολλὰ δὴ τὴν τύχην μεμψάμενος ὅτι πράξεων μεγάλων ὑποθέσεις εἰς ἓνα καιρὸν αὐτῷ συνήνεγκε, καὶ νομίζων ὡς ἀμφοτέρων ὑπαρχόντων ἀπολλύναι θάτερον, διηνέχθη τοῖς λογισμοῖς πολὺν χρόνον, Plut. *Pyrr.* 22.2; cf. Zon. 8.5.
- 11 Hammond, et al. (1972–88) 3:253, n. 3; *contra* Lévêque (1957) 558.
- 12 Plut. *Pyrr.* 22.3. Cineas likely died during or shortly after this mission in Sicily, as he is never mentioned again, Lévêque (1957) 455, n. 3.
- 13 Zon. 8.5; Plut. *Pyrr.* 22.3; Justin 18.2.12.
- 14 Vartsos (1970) 91–92. Diodorus (22.8.1–2) claims the Carthaginian army numbered 50,000, but see below about the unreliability of such numbers.
- 15 DS 22.7.4.
- 16 DS 22.7.5, 8.3. The reliability of the given size of Carthage's fleet and whether they were drawn from the fleet blockading Syracuse is unclear, Lévêque (1957) 458, n. 3; Cross (1932) 77; Garoufalas (1979) 102, n. 36.
- 17 These ships were probably built by Pyrrhus, DS 22.7.5; Lévêque (1957) 456–457, although Wuilleumier (1939) 131 suggests they were provided by the Tarentines.
- 18 DS 22.7.4, 8.3.
- 19 Lévêque (1957) 459.
- 20 DS 22.8.5; Plut. *Pyrr.* 22.4.
- 21 DS 22.8.2.
- 22 Plb. 7.4.5; Justin 23.3.2.
- 23 Borba Florenzano in Hackens, et al., eds. (1992) 207–223; Stazio (1978); Lévêque (1957) 465–470; Berve (1954); Brauer (1986) 160–163; Garoufalas (1979) 199–214.
- 24 Vartsos (1970) 94–95; Borba Florenzano in Hackens, et al., eds. (1992) 221–223; Hammond (1967) 570.
- 25 Borba Florenzano in Hackens, et al., eds. (1992) 218–219.
- 26 Alexander, see Borba Florenzano in Hackens, et al., eds. (1992) 223, n. 46, *contra* Lévêque (1957) 471–474. Alexander the Molossian had also struck some coins, possibly in Taras, Burnett in *La Magna Grecia da Pirro ad Annibale* (2015) 809.
- 27 De Callatay (2000) 210–211.
- 28 For Carthaginian armies in general, see Hoyos (2010) 153–163; Koon in Hoyos (2011) 77–94; Ameling (1993); Wise and Hook (1982).
- 29 As occurred on a massive scale after the First Punic War when the Carthaginians claimed an inability to pay the thousands of mercenaries that fought for them, leading to a general revolt called the Truceless War, Hoyos (2007).

- 30 Herod. 7.165; DS 11.20.2; 13.54.1–6; 14.76.2; 16.77.4; 23.8.1; Plut. *Tim.* 25.1; Plb. 11.20.2; Livy 28.12.13; App. *Ib.* 25.100.
- 31 Murray (1999); Steinby (2007) 23–27; Hoyos (2010) 149–153.
- 32 DS 22.8.1.
- 33 App. *Samn.* 11.2; cf. DS 22.8.2. The passage only mentions elephants and 8,000 cavalry, but is likely defective. Niebuhr (1853) 3:598, corrects the passage to read 8,000 infantry and cavalry. For an analysis of military strength and coin production, see Callatay (2000) 210–211.
- 34 Plut. *Pyr.* 21.10; Zon.8.5.
- 35 DS 22.8.4–5, 10.1.
- 36 DS 22.10.1; Plut. *Pyr.* 22.4; Lévêque (1957) 475–477.
- 37 DS 22.8.4; Plut. *Pyr.* 22.6; Lévêque (1957) 477.
- 38 Enna: DS 22.10.1. For the western cities, see below.
- 39 DS 22.8.3; 22.10.1.
- 40 DS 22.10.1. The exact location of Azones is unknown, but was likely along the coast between Acragas and Selinus, Lévêque (1957) 477, n. 5.
- 41 DS 22.10.2.
- 42 Plb. 1.55. Polybius incorrectly claims that Mt. Eryx is the second highest peak on Sicily behind Mt. Etna, Lazenby (1996) 140. The temple was supposedly founded by Aenaeas, Verg. *Aen.* 5.759–61.
- 43 Plb. 1.58; DS 24.8–9; Walbank (1957–1971) 1:122; Lazenby (1996) 148–150.
- 44 DS 22.10.3; Plut. *Pyr.* 22.
- 45 Lévêque (1957) 479.
- 46 Alexander slept with a copy of the *Iliad* under his pillow, Plut. *Alex.* 8.2. Alexander and Achilles: Arr. *An.* 1.12.1; 7.14.4; Plut. *Alex.* 15.7–9; Curt. 4.6.29; 8.4.26; DS 17.27. Alexander and Heracles: Arr. *An.* 1.11.7; 4.10.6; 5.3.2; 5.3.4; 5.26.5; 2.18.1; Plut. *Alex.* 24.5. As a descendant of Heracles: Arr. *An.* 3.3.1–2; 4.4.7; 4.11.6. Plut. *Alex.* 2.1. Attack on the city of the Malloi: Arr. *An.* 6.8–12; Curt. 9.4–5; Plut. *Alex.* 63; DS 17.98.
- 47 DS 22.10.4.
- 48 The summit was flat, large enough to support modest farming, offered pasturage for animals, and was naturally protected by cliffs. Later, in the First Punic War, Hasdrubal Barca occupied the site and from there harassed Roman operations for years, Plb. 1.56–57; cf. DS 24; Walbank (1957–1971) 1:121; Lazenby (1996) 147–148.
- 49 Meltzer (1879–1913) 2:236; Walter (1947) 118.
- 50 Plut. *Pyr.* 23.2; DS 22.10.5–6; Lévêque (1957) 481–484.
- 51 Beloch (1922–1927) 4.1:544.
- 52 There is some variation in the details and timing of the offer, Arr. *An.* 2.14, 25; Curt. 4.1.7–10; Plut. *Alex.* 29.7–8; Justin 11.12.1–2; DS 17.39.1.
- 53 The scope of Pyrrhus' campaign has led to some debate as to when the siege of Lilybaeum occurred, whether late in 277, Lévêque (1957) 507; Beloch (1922–1927) 4.1:355, or early in 276, Meltzer (1879–1913) 2:239. A significant difficulty with dating the siege to 277 lays in the timing of the campaign against the Mamertines and the Carthaginian peace offer, but these issues are the result of Plutarch's own confused chronology, see below.
- 54 DS 22.10.5; Vartsos (1970) 95–96.
- 55 Plut. *Pyr.* 23.1.
- 56 Plut. *Pyr.* 23.3; App. *Samn.* 12.1; cf. DS 22.10.7. This assertion is accepted by Beloch (1922–1927) 4.1:555 and Lévêque (1957) 485–489.
- 57 Plb. 1.42–55; DS 24.1–3; Zon. 8.15; Lazenby (1996) 124–132.
- 58 Plut. *Pyr.* 23.3; DS 22.10.7; App. *Samn.* 12.1.
- 59 DH 20.8; cf. Dio fr. 40.46.

- 60 Justin 23.3.3. The author makes a mistake in his epitome, swapping Alexander and Helenus.
- 61 Borba Florenzano in Hackens, et al., eds. (1992) 219–220.
- 62 Plut. *Pyrr.* 23.4–5; DH 20.8.3–4; Dio fr. 40.46; Zon. 8.5; Lévêque (1957) 489–491.
- 63 Justin 23.4.14.
- 64 Zon. 8.5; DH 20.8.4; Plut. *Pyrr.* 23.5. The Italians mentioned by Zonaras were likely Oscan mercenaries along the same lines as previous groups as opposed to being part of any Roman contributions, Meltzer (1879–1913) 2:550; *contra* Lévêque (1957) 486. The Numidians mentioned by Ennius and sometimes assigned to book six are not likely to have been linked to these reinforcements, Skutsch (1985) 426.
- 65 Plut. *Pyrr.* 23.5.
- 66 τοῦτο δὲ ἦν εὐπρέπεια μὴ φυγὴν εἶναι μηδὲ ἀπόγνωσιν τὸν ἀπόπλουν τῶν αὐτόθι πραγμάτων τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς οὐ δυνάμενος κρατεῖν Σικελίας ὥσπερ νεῶς παραχθείσης, ἀλλ’ ἔκβασιν ζητῶν, αὐθις ἔρριψεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς Ἰταλίαν, Plut. *Pyrr.* 23.6.
- 67 App. *Samn.* 12.1; Zon. 8.5.
- 68 Vartsos (1970) 92.
- 69 Justin (23.3.9) says Pyrrhus won a victory before withdrawing, perhaps trying to stabilize the situation in the face of Carthaginian attacks, but it is unclear how reliable this is, Lévêque (1957) 493.

6 A war ends

By 277, the Pyrrhic War was being fought on multiple fronts. As Pyrrhus attempted to bring the Sicilian Greeks under his control and campaigned against the Carthaginians in Sicily, the war in Italy continued. As with the war in Sicily, the surviving sources significantly decline in quality but nevertheless provide a clear picture. The conflict was defined by Roman aggression in southern Italy. Roman efforts continued to rely on a mixture of warfare and diplomacy to expand their influence now aimed at undermining the hegemony of Pyrrhus. By the time Pyrrhus returned to Italy, the situation was breaking down. Efforts to stem his mounting losses in the west culminated in the battle of Beneventum, but the king would not come out ahead in this fight. In the Roman narrative, this decline in Pyrrhus' fortunes was linked to a decline in his moral character as he slowly devolved into despotism, impiety, and ultimately failure in the face of Roman virtue.

Matters in Rhegium

Rhegium sat at an important strategic point on the Italian side of the straits separating the peninsula from Sicily. On the opposite side was the city of Messina inhabited by the Mamertines, allies of the Carthaginians at this time. The two cities were strategically important as they could regulate movement through the straits. Both were also centers of stories of betrayal. The Mamertines had been Oscan mercenaries employed by Agathocles. Instead of going back to Italy when their contract ended, they instead seized the city of Messina (then Zancle), killing the men and taking the women for themselves. Similar events transpired in Rhegium during the Pyrrhic War. These Oscans were allied with the Romans. Efforts were made by ancient writers to absolve the Romans of any responsibility in the massacre that took place, but even Fabricius, that pinnacle of virtue, is implicated in what transpired.

The first betrayal of the garrison of Rhegium is by far the most commonly related element in surviving materials.¹ Although the exact details vary somewhat, the basic story remains largely consistent. The

Romans dispatched a garrison made up mostly of Campanians to ensure that the inhabitants of Rhegium would not ally themselves with Pyrrhus and endanger movement through the straits. The Campanian commander, Decius Vibellius, fabricated evidence that the Rhegians were plotting to join Pyrrhus, using the supposed plot as a pretext to massacre the male inhabitants and seize the women for themselves. The garrison used the example of the Mamertines across the strait as inspiration, and allied with them after seizing control. Decius ultimately paid dearly for his treachery. Suffering from an eye condition, he brought in a doctor who gave him a poultice to rub on his eyes that actually burned out his ability to see. (The doctor was actually from Rhegium, unknown to Decius.)

In turn, the now consul Fabricius, appalled by these abuses, avenged the Rhegians and executed the Campanians, reinforcing the idea of Roman fidelity. The Romans were horrified at the actions by the garrison, who are specified not to be Romans, against their allies. Fabricius immediately rectified the situation, or, as some sources say, dealt with it as soon as the war allowed. But either way, the Romans acted virtuously. Fabricius himself, the man who had denied offers of wealth and power from Pyrrhus in favor of his own honorable humility, continues as an exemplum of Roman virtue.

The garrison of Rhegium was linked to its geographically important location. Most sources state that the garrison was installed in reaction to Pyrrhus' arrival, but Dionysius instead says that it was placed there by Fabricius during his consulship in 282 to secure it from attacks by neighboring peoples. This earlier date makes sense within the context of the war before Pyrrhus' involvement, while the king did not represent so much of an apparent threat to the city in 280. Fabricius' later involvement in punishing the garrison may also indicate he felt a personal responsibility due to his installation of it. Rhegium's following importance in the war against Pyrrhus may have resulted in a shift in date to more explicitly link the garrisoning to the king. As such, Rhegium becomes part of Rome's expansion in southern Italy alongside Thurii and other Greek cities. The garrison itself comprised 800 Campanians and 400 Sidicini allies.² Decius himself was from a prominent Capuan family. The lack of a Roman officer is not surprising as allied units commanded by their own native officers are to be found elsewhere around this time, such as Oblacus Volsinius at the battle of Heraclea.³

Rhegium was the site of a raid mentioned by Diodorus, who says that 500 Roman soldiers were taken aboard a Carthaginian fleet with the intention of attacking Pyrrhus' shipbuilding supplies at Rhegium. It is much more likely that this force used the city as a base from which to raid Pyrrhus' Bruttian allies who were providing timber for

ships.⁴ The king's alliance with the Bruttians as well as his intention to bring the Greek cities of both Italy and Sicily made Rhegium particularly important. As such, the Romans and Carthaginians combined their forces in a joint operation.⁵ The Campanian garrison would have acted as a supporting force for this joint operation, and may even have been the source of the '500 Romans'. The fragment of Dio may be poorly preserved or an attempt to claim that the garrison was in opposition to the Romans rather than acting on their behalf.

What then of the betrayal of the city by the garrison? Dionysius, Appian, and Dio specify that Decius fabricated evidence of pro-Pyrrhus sympathizers to justify their treachery, while others simply point to the general greed of the Campanians. Dionysius also mentions that a second version of the story had Fabricius himself order the garrison to take control of the city on the basis of rumors of support for Pyrrhus among the populace. Although he states that "either report is possible,"⁶ he clearly gives more weight to the story placing the full blame on Decius and the Campanians by constantly reinforcing their abhorrent nature in his narrative. This brief aside implicating Fabricius is found in no other surviving sources, which is hardly surprising given his historic reputation. Indeed, several versions of the story have Fabricius as the one who punishes the garrison. His involvement in ordering Decius' actions do not fit the moral component of the events at Rhegium and it undermines the entire depiction of Roman virtue that pervades the entire narrative of the war.

It is in fact very likely that pro-Pyrrhic sympathizers were to be found in Rhegium similar to the factionalism displayed in many other cities. Pyrrhus himself would have been eager to encourage any local support he had in the city. Rhegium would serve as a vital link between Magna Graecia and Sicily, it could regulate trade moving through the straits as a counterpoint to the Carthaginian-allied Mamertines, a garrison there would protect his Bruttian allies, and it would eliminate a major Roman base in the south. Fabricius, on the other hand, as consul in 282 had already been forced to retake Thurii when that city renounced its Roman alliance, which gave him firsthand experience with the internal political machinations that could undercut Roman hegemony. The presence of a Roman garrison in Thurii had not been sufficient to hold the city against internal and external pressure. It is certainly possible that Fabricius himself, perhaps with some evidence of pro-Pyrrhic factions, ordered the garrison in Rhegium to ensure the city remained friendly to Rome by any means necessary.

Roman complicity in these events is further reinforced by the apparent delay in their response. To be sure, Dionysius and Appian

insist that Fabricius immediately acted to punish the garrison, but their timelines are unclear. Livy's epitome refers to the action against the garrison at Rhegium taking place after the siege of Taras in 272, which is supported by other authors referring to a delay in Rome's response due to the pressures of the war with Pyrrhus.⁷ Dionysius says that a second uprising by another garrison in Rhegium was not put down until 270.⁸ But this duplication is rooted in the insistence that the Romans would not have allowed such an act to go unpunished for so long. A delayed response was due to the immediate concerns of the war with Pyrrhus. The actions of the Campanian garrison to keep Rhegium friendly to Rome must have been, at least unofficially, condoned.

Indeed, the punishment of the garrison seems to not be the result of the massacre at all. It was only when they threatened the peace imposed on southern Italy by the Romans years after Pyrrhus' departure that the city was restored to its former inhabitants. After Pyrrhus had withdrawn from Italy, the Campanian garrison attacked the nearby cities of Croton and Caulonia.⁹ Feelings of pity or responsibility were secondary to pragmatic concerns about this aggression. It may very well be that the Campanians were particularly brutal in their methods in Rhegium, eliciting local resentment, but the Romans did nothing about it for years in order to ensure control of this strategically important city. Pro-Roman writers shifted the blame to the Campanians alone, absolving the Romans generally and Fabricius specifically. The tale of Rhegium became a tale of morality that buttresses the overall image of Roman virtue during the war.

Italy during Pyrrhus' absence (278–276 BCE)

The war in Italy did not stop while Pyrrhus shifted his campaign to Sicily. Unfortunately, those sources that would have given the most detailed (if biased) account of these events, such as Dio Cassius, Dionysius, and Livy, are lost. Zonaras' epitome is the only extant source. While the narrative of this period is confused, significant military and political efforts were made on all sides. Although Pyrrhus had become a central focus, the underlying factors of the war before his arrival remained. The same fluidity of alliances and hard-fought gains typical of Italian warfare are well evident. Although the sources are problematic in detail, they nevertheless present a consistent picture of aggressive Roman involvement in southern Italy. Pyrrhus' allies were pressed hard in his absence. By 276, the Romans controlled the Italian coast from Rhegium to Heraclea, were able to march at will across Samnium, and had bottled up Pyrrhus' garrison in Taras.

At the end of 279, Pyrrhus had shifted his focus to the Sicilian

Greeks and soon departed for the island. He left behind garrisons in several cities with the largest in Taras, perhaps numbering 8,000 men, and promised to return.¹⁰ Milo commanded at Taras, while Pyrrhus' son Alexander remained at Locri, whose mint Pyrrhus was using to produce coins. Pyrrhus' strategy was to have the forces he left behind secure his gains among the Italiote Greek cities while his Samnite, Lucanian, and Bruttian allies acted as buffers against Roman aggression. Plutarch says that the Tarentines were upset over the king's decision to leave.¹¹ They demanded that he stay to fight the Romans or leave their city as he had found it. Pyrrhus' response was to order them to remain quiet; he would deal with things on his own schedule. The supposed hostility on the part of the Tarentines to the king's departure is used by Plutarch to demonstrate the sense of entitlement of the people of Taras, linking back to the foolish acts that had gotten them into this situation and their balking at Pyrrhus' insistence on discipline. In addition, this is an early indication of a decline in the king's moral character. Pyrrhus would begin to exhibit more despotic tendencies.

On the other side, Roman commanders continued to focus their entire attention on operations in southern Italy. No triumphs or campaigns are mentioned against northern Italian peoples after 280. The peace that had been made with the Etruscans held. In 278, the consuls were C. Fabricius Luscinus and Q. Aemilius Papus, who had been consular colleagues in 282.¹² Aemilius seems to have campaigned somewhere in southern Italy but failed to achieve anything of note.¹³ For Fabricius, 279 and 278 were an eventful couple of years. In 279 he had famously declined Pyrrhus' overtures of wealth and power in favor of his honorable poverty while serving as an envoy, and early the next year had allegedly been approached by Pyrrhus' doctor with an offer to poison the king, which he revealed to Pyrrhus, deeming such an act despicable. Once the king had left Italy in early 278, Fabricius was able to launch a significant military campaign. For this year, he celebrated a triumph over the Lucanians, Bruttians, Tarentines, and Samnites.¹⁴ Given that a battle against a combined force of these people akin to Sentinum seems unlikely, Fabricius apparently covered a great deal of ground. The triumph over the Tarentines may suggest that Milo opposed Fabricius in some fashion but failed to stop his depredations. The Senate may also have felt that whatever the scale of Fabricius' successes, a triumph would boost the spirits of the Romans after their defeats at Heraclea and Ausculum. Fabricius certainly had experience in the political and military arena of southern Italy, which gave him an edge in navigating the shifting situation in the region.

The Romans established an alliance with the city of Heraclea in

278. Cicero says that Heraclea had a particularly favorable treaty with Rome and that it was formed in the consulship of Fabricius (implying it was he who negotiated it) during the war with Pyrrhus, which would place it in 278.¹⁵ A treaty between Rome and Heraclea in 278 is consistent with events of that year. Roman diplomatic efforts would have been strengthened by Fabricius' military success, the consuls' prior contacts in the area, and Pyrrhus' recent departure. At the same time, a particularly favorable treaty, as Heraclea's was, is to be expected as the Romans were trying to reestablish a foothold in the region at this time. Heraclea was a strategically located city along the southern coast not too far west of Tarentum, as well as being symbolically important as the former head of the Italiote League. It was also near the site of the Romans' first defeat at the hands of Pyrrhus. The consuls would have been motivated to make concessions to secure an alliance with the city when Roman influence in the region was at a minimum. Pyrrhus' departure in 278 offered a significant opportunity for the Romans. His victories may have dampened Roman plans, but in his absence they could continue their aggressive campaigns. As Pyrrhus became bogged down in the political quagmire of Sicily, his Italian allies were on their heels.

In 277, the consuls were P. Cornelius Rufinus and C. Junius Bubulcus Brutus.¹⁶ As with the year before, both campaigned in southern Italy. Zonaras provides the only information for this year, which is light on particulars and heavy on romantic improbabilities. While Zonaras' fanciful description of events is problematic in detail, it nonetheless coheres with the larger project of Roman diplomatic and military efforts during this period and can be accepted with some reservation.¹⁷

The consuls at first operated jointly in Samnium. Zonaras says that the Romans recovered their courage, desired to punish those that had summoned Pyrrhus, and managed to quickly seize several fortified places in Samnium. However, the places the Romans took were deserted as the Samnites had withdrawn to hilltop forts.¹⁸ The consuls found the Samnites in the Cranite Mountains, the location of which is unknown. The Romans attempted to force their way up the difficult terrain, but suffered heavy casualties for which Rufinus and Brutus blamed one another. Under the right circumstances, the Samnites were still capable of inflicting losses on invading Roman armies, but they were also completely unable to stop the Romans from marching across Samnium at will.¹⁹ The consuls of 277 decided to simply ignore the people in the Cranite Mountains and focus their attention elsewhere with no significant negative consequences. The Samnites were, at this point, incapable of fielding an army sufficient to face the Romans in battle, requiring outside assistance to mount any

significant resistance.

As a result of their difficulties, the two consuls ceased their combined efforts for the rest of the year. Brutus remained in the southern Apennines, celebrating a triumph over the Lucanians and Bruttians.²⁰ Zonaras says that Brutus remained in Samnium, but he may be poorly epitomizing his source. Rufinus turned towards the Greek city of Croton, resulting in a rather spectacular tale. The city was apparently divided between pro-Roman and pro-Pyrrhic factions. While it remained in alliance with Pyrrhus, some local friends of Rufinus attempted to rebel and invited the consul to take control of the city. However, the other faction prevented this betrayal by requesting an Epirote garrison from Milo. Rufinus, after failing to assault Croton's walls, feigned an attack on Locri in order to get the garrison to move there. He then turned back and, aided by fog, took Croton. Nicomachus, the garrison commander, attempted to return to Taras but was ambushed by Rufinus and defeated. As such, Locri too joined the Romans. Pyrrhus' son Alexander, who had been in command in the city, must have withdrawn at some point although the circumstances are unknown.

It seems that Rufinus did manage to take Croton and Locri.²¹ While the specifics given by Zonaras are fantastic, they do reflect the complex geopolitical realities of the region. Frontinus indicates that the men sent to reinforce Croton were Lucanians, and that Rufinus simply pretended to withdraw so that they left.²² He does not mention any move towards Locri. A temporary increase of defenders in the face of a Roman consular army is logical enough. The factionalism within the city is certainly consistent with other nearby cities, as is the willingness to change sides when circumstances seemed to favor it. A pro-Roman faction may have played a role in convincing the garrison reinforcements that they were no longer needed. If they were Lucanians as Frontinus says, historic hostilities would have only added to the tension of the situation. Rome's recent successes in the area and Pyrrhus' continued absence were also factors in people's minds. Regardless of the confused details, by the end of 277 the Romans had gained control of three major cities along the southern Italian coast, effectively bisecting Pyrrhus' western domains.

Despite some setbacks, Roman efforts in 277 were largely successful in southern Italy. Brutus earned a triumph for his efforts. Rufinus, however, did not, perhaps due to disputes with Fabricius, who would expel him from the Senate as censor in 275.²³

In 276, the Romans faced greater difficulties. The consuls, Q. Fabius Maximus Gurgus and C. Genucius Clepsina, fought the Samnites, Lucanians, and Bruttians, for which Fabius earned a triumph.²⁴ However, two events blunted Roman efforts. The first problem was

the return of Pyrrhus to Italy, which is no doubt why no military or diplomatic operations are mentioned in Magna Graecia. The second problem was an outbreak of plague in the city of Rome, which supposedly resulted in widespread miscarriages and deaths among people and animals.²⁵ Whatever the scale of the plague, it would have undercut Roman war-making to some degree and may have affected recruitment. Nevertheless, the Romans had made significant gains in southern Italy during Pyrrhus' absence through a combination of military and diplomatic efforts. But his return from Sicily endangered those advances.

Pyrrhus' return to Italy

Matters had gone quite well for Pyrrhus when he first crossed to Sicily, but by early 276 everything was falling apart as he tried to tighten his grip. Italy too was in danger. Envoys from Pyrrhus' Italian allies traveled to see him in Syracuse, saying that they were no longer able to resist the Romans and would surrender if he did not come to help them.²⁶ The Samnites had proven largely ineffective in acting as to shield the Italiote Greeks as Roman armies marched through southern Italy with few difficulties. To make matters worse, Roman alliances with Heraclea, Croton, and Locri in addition to Rhegium threatened to strand Pyrrhus in Sicily if he remained. Sicily itself, especially Syracuse, was increasingly hostile. Pyrrhus had little choice but to leave the island, but crossing back to Italy was precarious. Increased Carthaginian aggressiveness following the failure of Pyrrhus' siege of Lilybaeum did not help.

Pyrrhus' immediate problem was in actually crossing the straits again. His fleet was strong, perhaps 110 ships, but was no larger than that of the Carthaginians.²⁷ The crossing was made more difficult than the first had been due to a Roman garrison in Locri in particular. In addition, the straits were being patrolled by Carthaginian vessels once more. Transporting his army, including elephants, all the way back to Taras by sea was not feasible as it risked storms, enemy attacks, and any other number of hazards that had destroyed many an ancient navy. Crossing at the shortest point was difficult as well since both Messina and Rhegium remained hostile. There was little other choice and Pyrrhus set out. But his fleet did not go unnoticed, losing several ships in a brief fight against the Carthaginians before he managed to escape.²⁸ Despite some losses, Pyrrhus made it.

Zonaras' account of Pyrrhus' arrival back in Italy is preferable to Plutarch's.²⁹ Plutarch describes these events but simplifies the narrative, implying Pyrrhus landed near Rhegium and then was harassed as he marched towards Taras, leaving out his looting of the

temple of Locri. He is telescoping what he considers superfluous happenings. While Zonaras' version is also condensed, it provides a more detailed description of Pyrrhus' attempts to secure the toe of Italy for himself.

According to Zonaras, Pyrrhus first sailed to Locri where the locals quickly reconsidered their Roman alliance and killed the garrison in the city.³⁰ Whether he landed at or near the city is unclear. Pyrrhus then attempted to secure his lines of communication with Sicily. Although the Syracusans and other Sicilian Greeks had become resistant to Pyrrhus' attempts to increase his power there, they remained allies up to this point. The king no doubt had given up his dreams of being a true king of Sicily, but securing the resources of the Greeks on the island to some degree was still imperative. As such, he attacked Rhegium in order to gain control of the Italian side of the straits. But he failed to take the city, which was still defended by its Campanian garrison.

As Pyrrhus withdrew from Rhegium, he faced a much more significant problem. He had extended himself by marching across the mountains of Bruttium and a significant force of Mamertines from Messana now harassed his retreat. The Mamertines must have also played a role in Rhegium's successful defense. These events may be the source of allegations by Roman sources that the Campanian garrison of Rhegium had made an alliance with the Mamertines. The mountains of Bruttium did not give Pyrrhus an easy path, but the Bruttians themselves were friendly with the king. Pyrrhus was pursued, according to Plutarch, by 10,000 Mamertines. Whatever the actual number, the Mamertines refused to engage in fixed battle. Instead, they used the terrain to harass Pyrrhus' men and even killed two elephants. Pyrrhus was forced to rush back and forth along his line of march to deal personally with these constant attacks.

During the retreat from Rhegium, Plutarch describes another instance of Pyrrhus' personal prowess in line with his fight with Oblacus Volsinius and his scaling the walls of Eryx. Pyrrhus suffered a wound to his head, which covered his face in blood in a rather gory display. At this moment a huge Mamertine challenged the king to single combat, if he still lived. Furious and drenched in blood, Pyrrhus responded. Before his opponent could act Pyrrhus brought his own sword down on the Mamertine's head, cutting the man completely in two. Having terrified his enemies, the king faced no further raids on his march back to Locri. While the details of this episode can be dismissed as unhistorical, Pyrrhus is portrayed as still formidable and the episode heightens the tension leading into the battle of Beneventum. Even when things were going poorly, either on a personal level from a sword wound to the head or on a strategic level

with the loss of allies, Pyrrhus could not be counted out. Regardless, the focus on Pyrrhus as an individual combatant overshadows the great amount of skill he displayed in extricating his army from Rhegium with minimal losses.

A good king gone bad

After having crossed from Sicily and failed to take Rhegium, Pyrrhus decided to loot the temple of Persephone in Locri in order to secure money to pay his men. This episode is well attested in surviving sources and was apparently referenced in Pyrrhus' own memoirs according to Dionysius.³¹ The king, urged on by three depraved advisors, seized huge quantities of gold from the temple. After all, Pyrrhus joked, fear of the gods should not get in the way of such a ready source of wealth.³² Zonaras adds that he put some local leaders to death for good measure, no doubt in response to the city's lack of loyalty. Pyrrhus then put the seized wealth on ships and sent them to Taras, but they were wrecked by a storm and the treasure was washed back onto the shores of Locri. Pyrrhus, now fearful of divine wrath, returned everything and more in an attempt to placate the goddess.³³ His efforts were not successful in assuaging her anger according to the priests of the temple. Pyrrhus' choice to loot the temple is telling of a significant change in his character late in the war. During his time in Sicily, the king began exhibiting darker tendencies at odds with the more-or-less noble opponent of the Romans who had first arrived in Italy.

Pyrrhus' character makes a dramatic shift as his time in Sicily comes to an end. In Syracuse he is said to have seized property, executed citizens, placed his own cronies in positions of power, and otherwise run roughshod over the traditions and institutions of the city. Of course Pyrrhus had been harsh in Taras when he first arrived, but that had been in reaction to the degeneracy of the Tarentines and thus a positive action. These failures of character were the reason the Tarentines needed to call for Pyrrhus in the first place. But in Syracuse, it was the despotic actions of Pyrrhus that spurred discontent against him. The king had met with spectacular success in nearly driving the Carthaginians from the island, which encouraged his desire to be a king of Sicily. His ultimate failure is thus the result of his own hubris, and his poor choices only continued as he returned to Italy. In Locri, he chose to violate divine law as he had those of men. (Plutarch does not mention the episode at Locri, preferring Pyrrhus' change of character not include sacrilege.)

For the Romans, the looting of the temple was an exemplary event that called to mind the corruption of later generations of Romans.

Diodorus and Livy both describe Pyrrhus' actions in the context of the similar looting of the same temple (among more horrendous crimes) by the Roman legate Q. Pleminius in 205.³⁴ According to Livy, madness resulted among the men involved rather than a shipwreck like Pyrrhus. The Locrians appealed to the Senate for redress of Pleminius' crimes, but for Diodorus it was not genuine piety that inspired the Romans to act. While Livy points towards anger at the poor handling of the situation by Scipio, he says it was jealousy over the distribution of the spoils. In a similar episode in 173, Q. Fulvius Flaccus took the roofing tiles from the temples of Juno in Lacinia, a city in Bruttium, for a temple he was constructing in Rome.³⁵ Pyrrhus' callous actions were repeated by the Romans a century later when they too sat in a position of power. Just as Pyrrhus' character was changing for the worse, so too were later Romans losing the virtues that had allowed them to beat Pyrrhus and gain an empire. As with Pyrrhus, the Romans of the later Republic would continue on the path of self-destruction.

Of course, the seeds of impropriety were always there, but held in check by his friend Cineas. In laying out his grandiose intentions to conquer the west, Cineas acts as a check on Pyrrhus' ambitions, a mouthpiece for the reader urging restraint. While he accompanied the king to Italy, he disappears shortly after the Sicilian campaign begins. His fate is unmentioned in the surviving sources, but the fact that his disappearance from the narrative coincides with Pyrrhus' decline in morals is certainly not a coincidence. From then on, Pyrrhus is found suffering poor advisors. It was those disreputable characters that benefited from his tyrannical actions in Syracuse, as well as they who encouraged looting the temple of Persephone. Without Cineas to rein in his darker tendencies, Pyrrhus' ambitions undermined his own efforts.

Pyrrhus' moral decline also recalls that of Alexander. Once the Macedonian king had defeated Darius in battle and effectively ended Persian resistance, he progressively devolved into megalomania.³⁶ Once-trusted associates were sent away or killed, new advisors of ill repute gained favor, Persepolis was burned to the ground (at the insistence of a courtesan according to some sources), and Alexander insisted upon his own divinity. While Alexander retained many of the features that had brought him success, power and success unleashed darker elements of his personality. The negative personality characteristics of both kings were brought out by those with whom they associated. Pyrrhus could not overcome the inherent weaknesses of his advisors, the Tarentines, and the Syracusans. Instead, he was corrupted.

It would be up to the Romans to succeed where Pyrrhus failed. For

Dionysius in particular, Pyrrhus' eventual fall is a morality tale. He was, at the start, a man to be admired, tricked into fighting the honorable Romans through the duplicity of the Tarentines. The Romans were unable to overcome this very capable general and could only barely hold their own, but through their resistance demonstrated their strength of character to the king. Pyrrhus was, ultimately, a tragic figure. Once committed to his path, fueled by hubris, Pyrrhus could not turn away. Through striving for the impossible in imitation of his cousin, he turned to despotism and impiety, which in turn doomed him to failure against the virtuous Romans.

Even at the end, the Roman narrative highlights that Pyrrhus still had the capacity to be a man of honor. After losing the battle of Beneventum, Pyrrhus escaped back to Taras. There, according to Dio/Zonaras, he meted out a harsh punishment for the doctor who had offered to assassinate him for the Romans.³⁷ The honorable choice by Fabricius to alert Pyrrhus to the plot rather than pursue it is juxtaposed with Pyrrhus' decision here to have a chair upholstered with the man's skin. It was meant to reinforce obedience among the Tarentines as the king prepared to leave Italy. It is no coincidence that the Imperial Age writer Dio Cassius (via Zonaras) paints a more negative portrait of the king as Curtius Rufus does with Alexander. But this cruelty is paired by Dio/Zonaras with another concurrent event. At a party a group of young men mocked Pyrrhus in a fashion that brings to mind the criticism of Cleitus towards the actions of Alexander.³⁸ In that instance, a drunken Alexander was enraged at his long-time friend and murdered him in cold blood. When Pyrrhus similarly decides to punish the young men, he first asks them why they had done it. They replied that they would have said much worse, but the wine ran out. Amused, Pyrrhus chose to let them go. While Pyrrhus' character had declined over the course of his campaign, he was still capable of some restraint unlike his more famous cousin.

The battle of Beneventum (summer 275 BCE)

The situation at the beginning of 275 had changed significantly for everyone involved in the Pyrrhic War. For the Carthaginians, things were looking better as Pyrrhus had been mauled in his withdrawal from Sicily with little chance of an immediate return to the island. Meanwhile, the Sicilian Greeks again fragmented. In Italy, the Romans had seen significant gains in the south with alliances reestablished among the southern Greeks. At the same time, the Samnites had been beaten back. For Pyrrhus, his position was greatly weakened. Control of the western Greeks could still be won and peace forced on his enemies, but bold action would be needed in order to gain the time to

forge something enduring. Pyrrhus' previous victories gave him the initiative against the once more cautious Romans, but he needed a decisive battlefield triumph. Ultimately, Pyrrhus would find the Romans near the Samnite city of Maleventum, better known by the name of the later Roman colony on the site, Beneventum.³⁹

In Roman eyes, the plague that had just struck only compounded the sense of disaster. The portents in 275 are said to have been, to put it mildly, horrific. On the Capitoline Hill the statue of Jupiter was struck by lightning, blowing its head off.⁴⁰ The implication is clear: Rome, as the head of Italy, was in danger of being removed by Pyrrhus. But the situation was salvageable. The haruspices managed to find the head, no doubt promising that no matter how grim things looked they would turn out well in the end. The sources (save only in the perpetually pro-Roman narrative of Dio/Zonaras) insist that everything was looking grim for the Romans.

For 275, the Romans elected M'. Curius Dentatus and L. Lentulus Caudinus as consuls.⁴¹ Only Curius, a plebeian, had held the consulship before; in 290 he had earned triumphs over the Samnites and Sabines as well as an ovation over the Lucanians. With his experience in the south, it would be Curius who would direct Rome's military efforts. However, the consuls faced significant problems recruiting men for their armies.⁴² When Curius drew lots for the first name of the levy, the man did not present himself for service. The consul was forced to turn to extremely harsh measures, selling the man into slavery and auctioning off all of his property. The convicted man's appeal to the tribunes of the plebs, defenders of the plebeian class, was ignored. With this accomplished, the levy continued uninterrupted as men now feared refusing to serve more than they feared Pyrrhus.

This hesitation to enlist serves as yet another spur for the reader's dread as well as the very real difficulties the Roman state faced in continuing the war at this critical juncture. The problem was twofold. The first issue was morale. The Roman senate had already come close to accepting peace in 280, and the men who would do the actual fighting faced the possibility of another ignominious defeat with heavy casualties. The second problem was a significant drop in the number of citizens, which had gone from 287,222 in 280/279 to 271,224 in 276/275 due mostly to the plague of 276.⁴³ The battles of Heraclea and Ausculum had also not helped the census figures. A 5.5% decrease in population over such a short period of time was a destabilizing element in society and would negatively affect the economy. The situation paralleled that which the Romans faced in the opening years of the Second Punic War, when the Romans lost so many men to Hannibal but still fielded more in the following years. As

they would do in that war, the Romans here needed to avoid significant losses and hold on to their gains while the situation at home stabilized.

With armies raised, the consuls marched south. The size of the Roman forces is not recorded. In the absence of any data, it is safest to accept that each consul commanded a standard force of two legions plus allies, some 20,000 apiece, as they had throughout the war. Curius invaded Samnium while Lentulus entered Lucania. Neither probably planned on moving much further south, just as the consuls of the previous year had avoided Magna Graecia as soon as Pyrrhus had returned.

Pyrrhus' position was precarious, but he decided on aggression rather than a defensive strategy. He may have feared further Roman efforts among the Italiote Greeks, which had undermined his control of the area during his absence. Retaking those cities would pin Pyrrhus down for a time, allowing the Romans a free hand to attack his allies elsewhere. Another victory on the battlefield could have potentially solved both problems: driving the consuls back and convincing wayward allies to return to their alliances with him. The king could also reinforce Samnium and Lucania as buffer regions. Another victory may also have convinced the Romans to make peace.

Pyrrhus' decision to march north was also informed by the numbers he had available for his army compared to the Romans. Pyrrhus is said to have returned from Sicily with some 20,000 men, which may have included a significant number of Lucanians and Bruttians picked up along the march back to Taras.⁴⁴ Orosius puts the total number of men Pyrrhus had at Beneventum at 80,000, and Dionysius says he outnumbered the Romans three to one.⁴⁵ Here, the situation is reversed from Heraclea. Now the inferior numbers of the Romans would overcome the huge army of Pyrrhus. More realistically, Pyrrhus' total forces in 275 may have numbered upwards of 40,000, including Epirotes, Italiote Greeks, Lucanians, Bruttians, and Samnites, but at Beneventum he commanded a smaller number of around 20,000–25,000.⁴⁶ He had already failed to obtain any reinforcements from Epirus. The king was in a similar position to the one he had been in in Sicily, increasingly reliant on his allies for support as his own men dwindled via attrition.

Pyrrhus sought to dictate the circumstances of the battles in order to gain the upper hand.⁴⁷ The consuls were not operating together, but were not so far apart that they could not support one another in short order if needed. As such, Pyrrhus decided to send forces to pin Lentulus in Lucania while he attacked Curius in Samnium with the best men of his army. Once he had won, Pyrrhus could then turn and crush Lentulus. With both consular armies defeated he would face

little resistance for the rest of 275 and he could roll back Roman gains in the south.

As with the battles of Heraclea and Ausculum, the surviving descriptions of the battle of Beneventum are fragmentary and contradictory.⁴⁸ Only Plutarch's narrative is complete, but just as brief as his descriptions of other battles. Dionysius' description is mostly lost, save for a few isolated episodes. Zonaras, Orosius, and Florus emphasize the role of Pyrrhus' elephants in his defeat. As with their descriptions of Heraclea and Ausculum, these authors use the elephants as a means of demonstrating the terror of Pyrrhus' forces, the bravery of the Romans in defeating them, and the ironic point that Pyrrhus' defeat was his own doing. But this undue emphasis on the elephants overshadows anything else about the battle that they found in their sources (Livy and Dio Cassius) and as such must be largely disregarded. Plutarch's narrative, which made use of a combination of Greek and Roman sources without falling into the same trap of overemphasizing the role of the elephants, serves as the most reliable of the sources on the battle of Beneventum.

The consul Curius took up position near the Samnite city of Beneventum (then Maleventum).⁴⁹ The city was located in the Calor River valley. To the southwest of Beneventum, through the pass of the Caudine Forks, were the rich plain of Campania and the Via Appia. To the northwest was the Volturnus River valley, which connected eventually with the Via Latina. Both roads gave direct access to Latium and Rome. As such, Beneventum represented a key chokepoint where Curius could deny access to the Roman heartland if Pyrrhus attempted to repeat his invasion of Campania and Latium. Whether or not the king intended anything of the sort is unclear, but it seems unlikely given the current strategic situation and the overall ineffectiveness of his earlier invasion of Latium. Beneventum served a similar purpose for Pyrrhus, controlling an important route into Samnium that the Romans had been exploiting. But Curius' army was the main target for Pyrrhus.

Curius took up position near a tributary of the Calor River in the foothills, which afforded him an excellent defensive position. He called for Lentulus to join him, at which point the Romans would outnumber Pyrrhus. His cautious approach was reinforced by unfavorable omens. Time was the ally of the Romans. The army Pyrrhus had dispatched to pin Lentulus in place could not have been intended to actually defeat the consul. Pyrrhus wanted to fight each separately, which meant that he needed to act fairly quickly before they could unite. The fact that Lentulus earned a triumph during this year over the Samnites and a new cognomen for seizing Caudium, a city only about 12 miles south of Beneventum, may indicate that he

was fast approaching. Pyrrhus needed to act.

The Roman position put Pyrrhus at a disadvantage. The hilly terrain was not favorable to his phalanx, cavalry, or elephants. So he decided upon a risky maneuver. He ordered a detachment of his best men to set out in the night, encircle the Roman position, and seize the high ground behind them.⁵⁰ He would then catch the Romans in a pincer, negating the strength of their position. That night, according to Dionysius, Pyrrhus experienced a terrible dream that made him doubt his decision, and it was only with difficulty that his advisors prevented him from calling his men back. Of course, in the hands of later Roman writers that dream proved prophetic. Dawn caught the men after they had spent the night struggling through dense forest in their heavy gear before they could complete their mission. They were exhausted, thirsty, and fully visible to the Romans. Curius ordered an immediate attack before the main body of Pyrrhus' army could move up in support of their comrades. The detachment was driven back without accomplishing anything but fatiguing Pyrrhus' best men.

Buoyed by his success, Curius ordered his army to attack into the valley. This decision was perhaps ill-advised as it mirrored events at Ausculum. There the Romans had marched onto open ground that favored Pyrrhus' troops, and suffered defeat as a result. Curius' army nearly suffered the same fate. The Romans drove the forward elements of Pyrrhus' army before them as they left the hills. It was then that Pyrrhus ordered his elephants forward, breaking a portion of the Roman line and driving them back in turn. But the battle was now a disorganized affair, and neither general could have exerted much control as their armies were victorious and defeated at various points on the field.

The assault of the elephants was put to an end by reinforcements from the Roman camp who harried the animals with javelins, eventually causing them to panic and flee.⁵¹ Dionysius insists that it was the distressed cries of a young elephant separated from its mother that panicked all of them. The animals then, we are told, ran amok through Pyrrhus' own ranks, disrupting the lines and causing his defeat. It was the efforts of the Roman reinforcements that turned back the beasts, no doubt with much difficulty. The Romans had already fought the animals twice already and were not as susceptible to them as they had once been. With the failure of his nighttime encirclement and charge of his elephants, Pyrrhus withdrew his men from the fighting.

As with earlier battles, the numbers of casualties are unreliable. Pyrrhus' dead are given as 23,000 or 33,000.⁵² Roman losses are not mentioned. More spectacularly, the Romans are said to have captured a number of elephants, which Curius then marched through Rome in

his triumph. Thus the elephants become not only symbols of Roman fortitude, but also celebrated agents of Pyrrhus' defeat in their own right.

Despite the claims of many sources, Beneventum was not a great victory for the Romans.⁵³ They had won the day, but Pyrrhus still commanded significant military forces that he withdrew south towards Taras. Lentulus had been similarly successful in Lucania, although against a lesser force.⁵⁴ Ideologically and strategically though, the battle was vitally important. Both consuls were given triumphs, Curius over King Pyrrhus and the Samnites, and Lentulus over the Samnites and Lucanians.⁵⁵ For the Roman people, these celebrations were proof that they could in fact beat this man who had defeated Roman armies and marched within sight of the City. Furthermore, the Romans consolidated their control of the Calor River valley, securing the path to southern Italy via Samnium. At the same time, they had preempted any future attempts to invade Campania and Latium within the near future. Pyrrhus was put on the defensive again; he would have to protect his allies against Roman attacks rather than launch his own offensives.

The war without Pyrrhus

By 275, Pyrrhus had been fighting continuously in Italy and Sicily for five years. It was his growing problem in financing the war rather than the battle of Beneventum that saw the conflict wind down. The king had come to Italy with whatever wealth he brought from Epirus as well as resources provided by various Hellenistic kings who were eager to get rid of him for a time. Two years of fighting against the Romans had significantly drained his assets. His Sicilian expedition required monetary exactions from his allies. In Syracuse, he took unpopular actions in seizing property from members of the aristocratic class in order to construct the navy necessary to take Lilybaeum alongside his attempts to consolidate political control. On his return to Italy he famously looted the temple of Persephone in Locri, for which he faced divine retribution, which Diodorus says was to meet the demand for pay from his soldiers.⁵⁶ Even before the abortive looting, Locri had been the location of one of Pyrrhus' mints, and tablets survive from the sanctuary of Zeus there that indicate a disbursement of money 'to the king'.⁵⁷ Pyrrhus had been maintaining a force of 20,000–30,000 men in the field for years, including significant numbers of mercenaries, as well as garrison forces.

Significant changes can be seen in the coinage from Taras later in the war. Coins minted in the city display images associated with Pyrrhus, such as the head of Zeus, thunderbolts, Athena, and

elephants on gold and silver coins. These issues also retained local Tarentine iconography such as references to the cult of the Dioscuri and dolphin imagery that indicates continued local autonomy underneath the king.⁵⁸ The head of Zeus, Athena, and thunderbolts are reflective of the same iconography Pyrrhus used in Sicily on his silver coins there, suggesting that these coins should be dated to after his return to Italy. While the elephants were not used in any of his Sicilian coins, they would have been particularly relevant in Italy where they had played a significant part in his battles against the Romans and were a symbol of strength. Pyrrhus did not attempt to seize direct control as he had in Syracuse, but he still required substantial financial support from the Tarentines and left little doubt of his own authority.

Taras' silver coins indicate the negative impact the war was having on the city's economy, as those associated with Pyrrhus were devalued. Silver didrachms were reduced by about 16.5%.⁵⁹ Similar weight reductions are found in the coins of Heraclea, Thurii, and Croton. By around 270, only Taras, and Heraclea to a lesser degree, continued to produce silver coins as both Croton and Thurii ceased to do so. It is impossible to date the devaluation of coinage in Magna Graecia precisely, but it was probably the result of the financial burdens supporting Pyrrhus' war efforts. The silver of the Italiote Greeks was going into the pockets of Pyrrhus' soldiers, creating a strain on their economies. These factors may have played into the hands of pro-Roman factions in Croton, Locri, and Heraclea, which had switched sides during Pyrrhus' absence in Sicily. The heavy financial exactions may also have fed into the discontent Pyrrhus experienced in Taras. The resources Pyrrhus had hoped to tap for his goals in the Hellenistic east were being drained in drawn-out wars against the Romans and Carthaginians, slowly bankrupting the Italiote Greek cities.

According to Justin and Polyaeus, Pyrrhus attempted to gain reinforcements from Antigonus II Gonatas who was now king of Macedonia.⁶⁰ Pyrrhus threatened that if he was not given support, he would be forced to return to mainland Greece instead of remaining in Italy. Antigonus refused. Polyaeus says that Pyrrhus then ordered for the opposite to be announced so that his wavering allies in Italy and Sicily would remain loyal in the belief that they had support from a wealthy new patron. But the situation was now crumbling in Italy as it had in Sicily and Pyrrhus decided to leave for Epirus. He certainly intended to maintain control of Taras itself, leaving a garrison under the command of his son Helenus and his trusted lieutenant Milo who had been in place since the king had gone to Sicily.⁶¹ Precisely when he sailed away is not mentioned, but early in 274 seems probable. He

returned to Epirus with some 8,000 infantry and 500 cavalry, likely the same core of men he had taken to Sicily. What resources he was able to draw from the western Greeks moving forward could not have been much.

Whatever control Pyrrhus had maintained upon his departure from Sicily quickly disappeared in 275 as the island returned to its status quo. Without his presence, Syracuse fell back into stasis. The Syracusan army was apparently continuing the war against Carthage, operating out of Megane in the mountains of the eastern portions of the island. According to Polybius, the men of the army and the people of the city came into conflict.⁶² Hiero and Artemidorus were chosen to lead the army. Returning to the city, Hiero was able to use his personal connections to gain admittance and overcame those that opposed him. He then secured his rule by marrying into a powerful family, eliminating disaffected mercenaries in the city (perhaps linked to Pyrrhus' time there), bringing in his own loyal mercenaries, and defeating the Mamertines in battle. Hiero was then named king of Syracuse and, in time, took the title of King of the Sicilians. In the turmoil, the Carthaginians once again took control of the portions of the island they had lost to Pyrrhus. The Mamertines continued to raid their neighbors. Pyrrhus' departure first from Sicily and then Italy ensured that his dominion on the island disappeared.

With Pyrrhus gone from Italy, the Romans had the opportunity to go on the offensive in southern Italy again. What the consuls of 274 were doing is unclear as there is no surviving information on their activities.⁶³ However, the next year saw the consul C. Claudius Canina campaign in southern Italy, earning a triumph over the Lucanians, Samnites, and probably Bruttians.⁶⁴ In 272, both consuls (L. Papirius Cursor and Sp. Carvilius Maximus) earned triumphs over the Samnites, Lucanians, Bruttians, and Tarentines.⁶⁵ In the aftermath of Beneventum Roman attention was strongly focused on their southern Italian opponents. Without Pyrrhus' presence they focused on finishing the war that had begun with the Samnites and Lucanians before even the Tarentines were involved. Their efforts, combined with the establishment of several colonies, put an end to any significant military activity from the southern Italian peoples until the arrival of Hannibal decades later. A Samnite named Lollius attempted to renew the war against the Romans in 269, but his efforts were brought to a swift end.⁶⁶ In the early 260s, campaigns followed that penetrated Calabria, with several triumphs over the Sallentini and Messappians, and Bruttium.⁶⁷

Taras, despite its central role in the Pyrrhic War, was left alone for a time. Perhaps the Romans feared an attack on the Epirote garrison there would draw the king back, especially since Helenus was present

for a time. But that situation changed in 272. In that year Helenus was with his father during his assault on Argos; when he left Italy is not mentioned. But in the time since Pyrrhus' own departure from Taras, political turmoil had drastically increased between the factions of the city. Zonaras says that a group of Tarentines, led by one Nico, who had been injured by Milo, attempted to oust the garrison commander from the citadel.⁶⁸ Having failed in their efforts, the hostile faction of Tarentines took control of a nearby fortress and continued to raid the city's environs. Their efforts were no doubt aided by friendly contacts that had remained, resulting in a difficult situation for Pyrrhus' men. Perhaps this was Helenus' motivation to join his father, leaving Milo alone in command.

The narrative of Taras' fall is as convoluted as its role in the outbreak of the war nearly ten years earlier. L. Papirius Cursor and Sp. Carvilius Maximus, the consuls in 272, were both fighting across the breadth of southern Italy, which would involve the final attack on Taras. Exactly what transpired to elicit the Roman action is unclear. Some among the Tarentine rebels would have been pro-Roman and perhaps had some personal connections, as had Agis in 281/280, who could have reached out to the Romans. Helenus had left the city by this point. In addition, in the summer of 272 Pyrrhus met his end in Argos. Whether the consuls undertook action before or after learning of the king's death is unclear, but the political infighting in Taras opened the door for Roman intervention. The consuls, with Cursor in the lead, used similar multi-pronged military and diplomatic tactics as their successors nearly ten years prior.

The attack on Taras would also involve the Carthaginians. According to Zonaras, the people of Taras were resentful at Milo as well as the rebels outside the city and, upon hearing of Pyrrhus' death, called for help from Carthage.⁶⁹ The Carthaginians sent a fleet that blockaded the garrison in the citadel while the Romans attacked from land. Milo still controlled the citadel of Taras, but he was in an untenable position. He decided to negotiate with Cursor and the Romans. Zonaras says Milo's motivation was the twin attacks of the Romans and Carthaginians combined with the hostility of the population generally, while Frontinus says that he tricked the Tarentines into sending him as an ambassador and betrayed the city in return for his own safety.⁷⁰ Frontinus seems to be simplifying the situation as an example of the betrayal of cities, which is reinforced by the complete absence of the Carthaginians. The Romans were taking advantage of internal political strife, the news of Pyrrhus' death, and the presence of the Carthaginian fleet to drive the garrison out. In exchange for safe passage, Milo surrendered the citadel to the Romans and withdrew back to Epirus with his men. Turning the citadel over to

the Romans may be the treachery at the heart of Frontinus' version of events, as many people in Taras were very much anti-Roman still. Regardless, Taras and the last vestiges of Pyrrhus' presence in Italy had fallen to the Romans.

With the fall of Taras, whatever cities were not already allied with Rome quickly sent ambassadors. The people of Locri, who had joined Pyrrhus twice and produced coins for his war effort, found it expedient to emphasize their fidelity to Rome. The city issued a new series of coins that showed the goddess Roma crowned with πίστις ('faith', cf. Latin *fides*).⁷¹ It would seem that the Romans were willing to accept these assertions of loyalty, no doubt in conjunction with the strengthening of pro-Roman local leadership. The Italiote Greeks were useful allies; they were wealthy, connected with the trade networks of the Mediterranean, and strategically located in relation to Samnium and Lucania. For the Greeks themselves, Roman hegemony was at this point an inevitability. At least until some other potential savior made an appearance.

Notes

- 1 DH 20.4–5; App. *Samn.* 9.1–3; Plb. 1.7; Dio fr. 40.7–12; Zon. 8.6; DS 22.1.2; Livy *Per.* 12; Oros. *Hist.* 4.3.4–6.
- 2 DH 20.4. The Sidicini inhabited the northern edge of the Campanian plain. Polybius (1.7.1) gives a number of 4,000, which roughly coincides with the 4,500 men executed after Dionysius' fictitious second uprising (20.16), see below. The specificity of Dionysius' description for the size of the initial garrison (20.4), particularly mention of the Sidicini, suggests a basis in historical knowledge, while the numbers of Polybius may be a generalization of a legion-sized group or perhaps the total number was increased over time, *contra* Beloch (1922–1927) 4.2:484. Livy (*Per.* 12, cf. 28.28.3; Oros. *Hist.* 4.3.3) calls the men under Decius a *legio Campana* implying 4,000–5,000 men, but again is being used in a generic sense, Walbank (1957–1971) 1:53. The legal status of the Campanians as *cives sine suffragio* is unclear in its military and political nature, Frederiksen (1984) 224; Mouritsen (2007). Decius is described variously as a χιλιάρχος (DH 20.4), προϋπάρχος (Plb. 1.7.1), and *praefectus* (Livy *Per.* 12).
- 3 Other examples include Herius Poltilius who led a group of Samnites to serve as rowers in Roman fleets in the First Punic War (Zon. 8.11; cf. Oros. *Hist.* 4.7.12), and Numerius Decimius who joined the dictator Q. Fabius Maximus with 8,500 Samnites in the Second Punic War (Livy 22.24.11–14). No *praefecti sociorum*, Roman officers who commanded allied contingents in later armies, are mentioned before the Second Punic Wars.
- 4 DS 22.7.5; Beloch (1922–1927) 4.2:479–485; Lévêque (1957) 419–20; *contra* Lefkowitz (1959) 156 who suggest that the target was the rebellious garrison of Campanians in Rhegium.
- 5 This is the most commonly accepted reading, Beloch (1922–1927) 4.2:479–485; de Sanctis (1956–1964) 2:407; Wuilleumier (1939) 131; Lévêque (1957) 419–20. Hoyos (1984) 432–434, argues that the raid must have been solely a Carthaginian enterprise based on his reading of the Roman-Carthaginian treaty's

- Pyrrhus clauses and the apparent origin of the fleet from Sicily as opposed to Italy. However, the Rhegium garrison itself may be the source of the Roman contingents. Huss (1985) 212 suggests that the Romans would not have allowed such an operation on the peninsula without their involvement, but this accepts the anachronistic Roman claims to dominion over all of Italy and discounts the provisions of previous Roman-Carthaginian treaties that allowed such activities.
- 6 ἐχει δὲ λόγον ἀμφοτέρω, DH 20.4.6.
 - 7 Livy *Per.* 15; cf. Oros. *Hist.* 4.3.5; Dio fr. 40.12; Plb. 1.7.9; Zon. 8.6.
 - 8 Dionysius (20.16) and Orosius (*Hist.* 4.3.4–6) claim the consul C. Genucius Clepsina took Rhegium, but it is the other consul of 270, Cn. Cornelius Blasio, who is recorded as celebrating a triumph over the city, Degrassi (1954) 99. It is possible that both were involved, as seems suggested by Polybius (1.7.8–13).
 - 9 Zon. 8.6; Paus. 6.3.12; Walbank (1957–1971) 1:53.
 - 10 Zon. 8.5; Justin 18.2.12; App. *Samn.* 12.1; Weuilleumier (1939) 131.
 - 11 Plut. *Pyrr.* 22.3; cf. Paus. 1.12.5; Brauer (1986) 166, n. 22, *contra* Lévêque (1957) 420–422.
 - 12 *MRR* 1:194. They would also serve together as censors in 275.
 - 13 Frontinus (*Str.* 1.4.1) says that Aemilius was ambushed by a Tarentine naval squadron while marching along the coast in Lucania. The circumstances suggest this took place on the southern coast of Magna Graecia, which may have happened in this year or in 282.
 - 14 Degrassi (1954) 98; Lévêque (1957) 510; Weuilleumier (1968) 131–132.
 - 15 Cic. *Balb.* 22; *Arch.* 6; Brauer (1986) 153; de Sanctis (1956–1964) 2:411. Lévêque (1957) 510 doubts Cicero, who he interprets as being unsure. Dating the treaty to Fabricius' consulship in 282 is very problematic, Weuilleumier (1968) 132. However, Weuilleumier's own suggestion of a confusion of Fabricius for Fabius, consul in 273, alongside Beloch's (1926) 464 that the treaty was formed in 272 in connection to the fall of Taras, contradicts Cicero's statement that the treaty was made while Pyrrhus was in Italy.
 - 16 *MRR* 1:194–95.
 - 17 Zon. 8.6. Lévêque (1957) 510–512 and Beloch (1922–1927) 4.1:555 argue that Zonaras' narrative should be largely rejected as unreliable.
 - 18 For a discussion of these forts in general, see Oakley (1995).
 - 19 Salmon (1967) 285.
 - 20 Degrassi (1954) 98.
 - 21 De Sanctis (1956–1964) 2:391–411; Walbank (1957–1971) 2:332; *contra* Weuilleumier (1968) 132; Beloch (1926) 465; Lévêque (1957) 511–512.
 - 22 Front. *Str.* 3.6.4.
 - 23 *MRR* 1:196; see Epilogue.
 - 24 Degrassi (1954) 98; Zon. 8.6.
 - 25 Oros. *Hist.* 4.2.2; August. *De Civ. D.* 3.17. The severity of the disease is exaggerated as a means of demonstrating the superiority of the Christian god over those of the pagans.
 - 26 Justin 23.3.5.
 - 27 App. *Samn.* 12.1.
 - 28 Plut. *Pyrr.* 24.1; App. *Samn.* 12.1; DS 27.4.3; Zon. 8.6. Appian exaggerates the scale of this defeat by insisting that Pyrrhus lost all but 12 ships, but it seems to have little to any impact on his campaign as a whole, Lévêque (1957) 514–515.
 - 29 Zon. 8.6; Plut. *Pyrr.* 24.
 - 30 Zon. 8.6; cf. App. *Samn.* 12.1.
 - 31 DH 20.9–10; App. *Samn.* 12; DS 27.4.3; Dio fr. 40.48; Zon. 8.6; *DVI* 35.9; Lévêque (1957) 499–501.
 - 32 ἐπισκώπας τὴν ἄκαιρον θεσέβειαν εἶναι δεισιδαιμονίαν, τὸ δὲ σθλλέξαι

πλοῦτον ἄπονον εὐβοθλίαν, App. *Samn.* 12.1.

- 33 The reality of the shipwreck has been doubted as a later invention of divine wrath, Wuilleumier (1939) 135.
- 34 Diod. 27.4; Livy 29.6–9, 16–22; *MRR* 1:304. Livy's account is much more detailed than Diodorus' and enumerates far more crimes on the part of Pleminius that went unpunished by Scipio, which fits his broad emphasis of the divine, Levene (2010) 344–347.
- 35 Livy 42.3. The Senate ordered the tiles returned, but Flaccus did not bother to actually put them back in place on the roof.
- 36 Green (1991) 324–325, 452–453.
- 37 Zon. 8.6. Zonaras is the only surviving source that gives the man's name, Nicias.
- 38 Dio fr. 40.47; Zon. 8.6.
- 39 A Latin colony was founded on the site in 268. Maleventum had a negative connotation in Latin, eliciting the name change, Plin. *Nat.* 3.42; Livy 9.27.14; Salmon (1970) 63.
- 40 Livy *Per.* 14.
- 41 *MRR* 1:195.
- 42 Val. Max 6.3.4; Livy *Per.* 14.
- 43 Livy *Per.* 13, 14; Forsythe (2005) 357. Dio (fr. 40.39–40) meanwhile insists that the Romans were eager to enlist to defend their homeland, and that a speech changed their fear of Pyrrhus to courage and hatred.
- 44 Plut. *Pyrr.* 24.4; de Sanctis (1956–1964) 2:413. Griffith (1935) 62–63 also suggests he had a significant number of mercenaries from Sicily.
- 45 Oros. *Hist.* 4.2.6; DH 20.10.1.
- 46 Lévêque (1957) 520–521; Wuilleumier (1939) 136.
- 47 Dio fr. 40.45.
- 48 Plut. *Pyrr.* 25; DH 20.11–12; Zon. 8.6; Front. *Strat.* 2.2.1; Livy *Per.* 14; Florus 1.13.11; Oros. *Hist.* 4.2.3; Eutr. 2.14.3; Lévêque (1957) 521–524; Wuilleumier (1939) 134–136.
- 49 Plutarch (*Pyrr.* 25.2) places the battle in the vicinity of Beneventum. Orosius (*Hist.* 4.2.3) and Florus (1.13.11) place it in the Arusinian plains in Lucania (near Paestum). Frontinus (*Str.* 4.1.14) says the Arusinian plains near Beneventum. Beloch (1922–1927) 4.1:557 has suggested that both consuls fought a single battle against Pyrrhus in Lucania. Lévêque (1957) 518–519 based on Beloch, Frontinus, and Livy (25.16–17), argues that the confusion of location is an error based on the fact that the Calor River flows from Lucania, near the Arusinian plains, to Beneventum. Wuilleumier (1939) 134–135 suggests that the confusion was caused by two nearly simultaneous battles in Samnium and Lucania.
- 50 Plut. *Pyrr.* 25; DH 20.11; cf. Enn. *Ann.* fr. 205–206. Plutarch says that Pyrrhus himself commanded this force, while Dionysius has him remain in his camp to experience a prophetic dream while it was happening. It seems unlikely Pyrrhus would have risked himself in such an action, and his presence was certainly not as important as it would be with the main body of men where he is to be found during the subsequent battle.
- 51 Plut. *Pyrr.* 25.5; cf. DH 20.12.
- 52 Eutr. 2.14.5; Oros. *Hist.* 4.2.6.
- 53 Beloch (1922–1927) 4.1:557 argues based on Polybius (18.28.11) and Justin (25.5.5) that the battle was a draw; cf. Lévêque (1957) 525–526. Zonaras' claim (8.6) that Pyrrhus was forced to flee with only a few horsemen is clear exaggeration meant to highlight the scale of the Romans' victory.
- 54 Wuilleumier (1939) 134–135.

- 55 Degrassi (1954) 98.
56 DS 27.4.3.
57 Marchetti in Hackens, et al., eds. (1992) 61–72.
58 Brauer (1986) 160–161.
59 Burnett in *La Magna Grecia da Pirro ad Annibale* (2015) 819–882; Brauer (1986) 141–162; Stazio (1971) 171–174.
60 Just. 25.3.4; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 6.6.1.
61 Plut. *Pyrr.* 26.2; Zon. 8.6; Just. 25.3.4.
62 Plb. 1.8–9; cf. Zon. 8.6; Justin 23.4.
63 M. Curius Dentatus and Ser. Cornelius Merenda, *MRR* 1:196.
64 Degrassi (1954) 98 suggests ‘*Bruttieisque*’ in the lost portion of the entry for this year, but it is not certain.
65 *MRR* 1: 197; Degrassi (1954) 98–99.
66 DH 20.17.1–2; Dio fr. 42; Zon. 8.7; Salmon (1967) 288. Beloch (1926) 474, argues that this was a minor affair as no triumphs were awarded, but Salmon (*loc. cit.*) points out that both consuls were dispatched suggesting that it was seen as a significant threat and that the lack of triumphs was due to the fact that they were reclaiming lost territory rather than conquering new.
67 Degrassi (1954) 99; Zon. 8.6; DH 20.15.
68 Zon. 8.6. Zonaras is sloppy in his epitomizing here, suggesting that the Tarentine rebels then contacted the Romans for an alliance. However, Dio fr. 33 shows that it was the Caerites who contacted the Romans and that Zonaras has combined the two events.
69 Zon. 8.6. Orosius (*Hist.* 4.3.1–2; 4.5.2; *Livy Per.* 14) gives a far more hostile account of Carthaginian involvement, suggesting that they came to help the Tarentines fight the Romans.
70 Zon. 8.6; Front. *Strat.* 3.3.1.
71 Head (1911) 103–104; Walbank (1957–1971) 2:332.

Epilogue

Up to this day, you would have seen nothing beyond the cattle of the Volscians, the flocks of the Sabines, the carriages of the Gauls, and the broken arms of the Samnites. Now if you looked at the captives, you saw Molossians, Thessalians, Macedonians, Bruttians, Apulians, and Lucanians. If you looked at the parade, you marked out the gold, the purple things, the Tarentine paintings and luxuries.¹

When describing the triumphal processions that paraded through Rome with the end of the Pyrrhic War, Florus emphasizes it as a moment of accomplishment in the conquest of Italy and the beginning of the period of trans-Mediterranean conquests. This was a transitory moment in Roman history. The ancient enemies of the Roman people had been defeated. Gone were the glorified cattle raids of neighbors only a few miles away. Now even the furthest reaches of Italy had been conquered. More importantly, the people of the city now witnessed their defeat of peoples from beyond the peninsula. Dentatus is said to have even marched elephants through the streets of Rome. This was only the first triumph of many that would see the conquest of a vast empire.

The Pyrrhic War is the culmination of Rome's heroic age in the history of Dionysius when great deeds, personal combats, and divine intervention were still commonplace. Here it is useful to return to the battle of Beneventum. According to Dionysius, the night before the fighting Pyrrhus had a horrific dream in which his teeth fell out and blood ceaselessly poured from his mouth. He had just ordered a group of his men to seize a strategic point behind the Romans in the middle of the night and now, due to the dream, feared that this dangerous action was a mistake. His advisors, however, convinced him not to let this opportunity pass. This episode serves as a counterpoint to the destruction of the statue of Jupiter described in the epitome of Livy. The gods sent portents of doom to both sides, leaving the outcome of the fight unknown. The Romans defeated their fear, religiously and militarily, and overcame their obstacles. But Pyrrhus, on the other hand, Dionysius says, "was not strong enough to conquer Fate."²

In this fashion, the battle of Beneventum is the climax of the Roman narrative of the war. It was a microcosm of the entire struggle. The Romans validated their greatness through victory against both the

divine and the mundane, while Pyrrhus would always be one step short. Fate constrained Pyrrhus, but was unable to hold back the Romans. Indeed, Fate herself seemingly walks the battlefield. Gone are the tactical maneuvers of the fight, replaced by the seemingly random event of a baby elephant calling for its mother and throwing everything into confusion. The elephants become Pyrrhus' hubris made manifest. This same pattern can be seen in Pyrrhus' later assault on Argos where he pulled his helmet off so that everyone could see him as he marched through the city in triumph. Then an old woman threw a roof tile that hit him in the head, resulting in his death.³ He could never conquer Fate like his enemies the Romans or his cousin Alexander.

Despite Roman exaggeration, Pyrrhus was not Alexander. He came to Italy and then Sicily not in hopes of conquering the west in imitation of his cousin, but with the intention of bringing the Greek cities of Italy and Sicily under his control. He always had his eyes on the wars of the Hellenistic east, but lacked the resources to compete with his more powerful rivals. Political unification of the Italiote and Sicilian Greeks had been a limited reality only a decade prior under Agathocles, king of Syracuse and Pyrrhus' sometime father-in-law. War with the Romans and Carthaginians were tangents, not objectives. Pyrrhus pursued peace with the Romans and attempted to drive the Carthaginians from Sicily. But he failed to understand the geopolitical roots of the problems he faced. Factions divided Syracuse, Taras, and other cities, which he tried to rise above but in reality failed to find strong connections with local leadership. His attempts to quickly end foreign wars failed to take into account the drawn-out and tenacious nature of Italian warfare in which the Romans thrived, and the Carthaginian skillfulness at exploiting the internal dissension of their enemies while exercising strategic patience. Even those smaller communities that often fall out of the narrative pursued their own interests first in a fluid military and political environment. Pyrrhus' success on the battlefield was insufficient to realize his goals. But victory in the Pyrrhic War served as proof of Roman greatness for later generations. They had defeated a man who they insisted was nearly comparable to Alexander the Great.

Rome's new status as a major power is confirmed in an alliance with Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the king of Egypt and successor to Alexander. Q. Fabius Maximus Gurgus, N. Fabius Pictor, and Q. Ogulnius Gallus were sent to Egypt in 273 as ambassadors where they were treated well, given gifts, and concluded a treaty.⁴ Rome was welcomed into the circle of great powers in recognition for defeating Pyrrhus. In this moment of triumph, the virtue of early Rome is reinforced in two events that contrast with the negative impact of empire upon later

generations.

During the censorship of C. Fabricius Luscinus and Q. Aemilius Papus in 275 the issue of foreign luxuries was addressed.⁵ This was the same Fabricius who had twice been consul during the war and had famously embraced his humble fortune in the face of Pyrrhus' promises. Now in the position of censor and moral enforcer, Fabricius expelled P. Cornelius Rufinus from the Senate for the extravagance of owning silver drinking cups that weighed ten pounds. Rufinus had twice been consul and once dictator, but his display of luxury is shown in opposition to the humility of Fabricius, who is the epitome of early Roman virtue. Dionysius proceeds to then praise the office of the censor, which he says had the responsibility of reviewing all of the actions of citizens in public and within the household even to the way a father raised his children and a husband treated his wife. The censor made sure that everything was done in the best way and for the good of the community.

Much better were the actions of the ambassadors to Ptolemy. When given magnificent gifts, they tried to deposit them in the public treasury rather than keep such ostentation for their own benefit. In recognition for their achievements, the Senate allowed them to retain the gifts. Here the individual is subordinated to the community. Luxury was not in and of itself a bad thing; it was the motives of the person that made it so. The community, represented by the Senate, gives permission to keep items that no doubt surpassed those Rufinus had owned because of their honorable attempts to deposit them. Rufinus becomes an exemplum of the negative impact of empire on Rome, foreshadowing the moral decline in the second century that resulted from the influx of wealth from their conquest of the Mediterranean. For the moment, at the end of the Pyrrhic War when the Romans stood triumphant, they retained the moral superiority that had seen them through the conquest of Italy.

For Dionysius, Roman achievement was linked to the Greek roots he imagined for them. Many of the virtues of the Roman people, he insists, were linked to a memory of their Greek origins. As they defeated the peoples of Italy, the Romans continued to embody those ancient ideals even as the Greeks themselves became barbarized in the wake of Alexander the Great. With the defeat of Pyrrhus, the Romans demonstrated themselves not only as the successors of Alexander as well as the Greeks in general. Pyrrhus remarks that the Romans are to be admired. He is portrayed as a petitioner after the battle of Heraclea rather than a victor, coming to the Senate in hopes they will grant him peace. But even in their moment of triumph, Dionysius notes that the same corruption would eventually infect the Roman people as individuals sought greater personal glory for themselves.⁶ It

was the loss of the values embodied by Fabricius to which later Roman historians, politicians, and philosophers pointed as the reason for the civil wars that ended the Republic. The community, the *res publica*, that had once been preeminent was replaced by men like Rufinus who put their own desires before their fellow citizens. The story of the Pyrrhic War is shaped into both a laudatory and a cautionary tale.

The narrative of the war is not only a commentary on the far future of the Republic, but also a preamble to the challenges of the Punic Wars. As Polybius had said, the war is portrayed as the moment when Italy became Roman in fact as well as by right. While Pyrrhus is labeled as a foreign invader of Roman space, he is only a momentary foe for the Romans. The most impactful violation of Italy is due to the Punic faith of the Carthaginians. They had already shown their untrustworthiness. The Roman Senate is said to have rejected an offer of support by the Carthaginian admiral Mago. The brief descriptions of the exchange make it clear that the Romans needed no outside help and certainly did not want foreigners in Italy (Pyrrhus or Carthaginians). Mago supposedly then reached out to Pyrrhus in an attempt to play both sides, displaying his Punic faith. So too, we are told that when the Carthaginians had suffered severe losses to Pyrrhus in Sicily they attempted to pay him to go away, implicitly suggesting a return to Italy and war with Rome with which they were supposedly cooperating. But it is during the siege of Tarentum that they prove themselves as enemies of the Roman people.

In Zonaras' somewhat confused version, the Carthaginians aided the Roman siege of the city with a naval blockade after being called by the faction hostile to the garrison commander Milo. Orosius' account, on the other hand, taken from Livy's lost book 14, is far more coherent and deeply hostile.⁷ As with Zonaras, he says that the Tarentines asked for Carthaginian help upon hearing of Pyrrhus' death. But gone are the internal political divisions. A united Taras has called for Carthaginian help against the attacking Romans. The Carthaginians then arrive and lose a fight with the Romans. They had arrogantly expected to easily sweep aside the Romans, but now are shocked that they could possibly lose. Most importantly, the Carthaginians have trespassed in Roman space. The Philinus treaty had supposedly defined Italy and Sicily as Roman and Carthaginian space respectively. Part of Polybius' rejection of the treaty was exonerating Roman guilt in getting involved in Sicilian affairs, which directly led to the First Punic War. The Livian tradition, from which Orosius derives, takes a different tack, asserting that the Carthaginians were to blame for future conflicts because they had already broken the agreement by coming to the aid of Taras, which is also reflected in

Dio.⁸ The version found in Zonaras, suggesting Roman and Carthaginian cooperation to some degree, seems the more likely. The two peoples had a long relationship that stretched back to the founding of the Republic. Mago's mission was one of support against a common foe, and there is no reason to think that the Carthaginians would take such a bold step as to aid the Tarentines against Rome. It makes no sense in the context of the time. The continuous denigration of the Carthaginians throughout the narrative of the Punic War is setting the stage for the next phase of Roman expansion in the Punic Wars.

Many of the events of the Pyrrhic War parallel those of the Second Punic War some 50 years later. In particular, the deeds of Pyrrhus and Hannibal are very similar. In both wars, the Romans faced a skilled general, each of whom invaded Italy. Both employed sophisticated tactics on the battlefield that Roman generals had serious difficulty countering (although some writers would insist the Romans won their battles against Pyrrhus). Both brought elephants with them to Italy, which the Roman legionaries feared at first but ultimately overcame. Both were joined by rebellious Italian peoples such as the Samnites, Lucanians, Bruttians, and Tarentines. (Unlike Pyrrhus, Hannibal was also able to persuade the Campanians to join him.) And in terms of martial skill, the two are described as among the best generals of all time. During his apocryphal meeting with Scipio Africanus, Hannibal ranks himself as the third greatest general in history just after Pyrrhus. "Then Scipio broke out into laughter and inquired, 'What then would you have said if you had beaten me [at Zama]?' 'Then doubtless,' [Hannibal] said, 'I would be before Alexander and before Pyrrhus and before all the other generals.'"⁹

Pyrrhus and Hannibal, despite their prowess, were unable to take advantage of their victories or overcome Roman tenacity. After the battles of Heraclea and Cannae respectively, each general is said to have been presented with the opportunity to attack Rome itself. Both were urged to attack the city by their lieutenants Milo and Maharbal respectively, but chose not to do so. Each may have defeated Roman armies, but they could not defeat the Roman spirit. After these two losses on the battlefield some Romans did in fact despair. After Heraclea, the Senate, we are told, was on the verge of accepting a peace dictated by Pyrrhus. Meanwhile, some survivors of Cannae thought all was lost and considered abandoning Rome. But each group was rallied by a patriotic call to fight on against the odds. Defeat was only momentary; victory in the long term was assured due to the superiority of the Roman people. In the end even the greatest generals fell before the collective might of the Romans, just as Alexander himself would have done, had he come to Italy, Livy says.

While many of the deeds of Pyrrhus and Hannibal are similar, there is a significant difference in intention as with Rufinus and the ambassadors to Ptolemy. A clear distinction is made in the character of each. Maharbal mocks Hannibal, saying that he is capable of winning battles but that he does not know how to use the victory.¹⁰ Pyrrhus, on the other hand, decides to follow the advice of Cineas and try to negotiate in recognition of Roman virtue. Hannibal proves a fool, while Pyrrhus makes the better choice. At the battle of Heraclea Pyrrhus nearly lost his life due to an attack by Oblacus Volsinius, prompting the king to switch armor with one of his companions, Megacles, in order to protect his life from any further attempts. Similarly, Hannibal feared assassination and, it is said, wore various disguises from day to day in order to hide his identity.¹¹ But the circumstances of these actions and their motivations are radically different. Pyrrhus was in the midst of battle, personally reinforcing his men where the fighting was heaviest. And when Megacles fell, Pyrrhus threw off his helmet to assure his men that he lived. Hannibal, on the other hand, hid in his daily life, not from any real threat but from only the fear of one. Pyrrhus' action may have not been the most admirable, but it is understandable and ultimately one he redeemed by again exposing himself to danger. Hannibal was acting merely as a coward jumping at shadows. So too, in the ranking of generals Hannibal places himself highly, asserting that only one victory more would have made him the greatest of all time. Pyrrhus appears on the same list, here and elsewhere, but he never is the one placing himself so high. It is always others that remark on his skill. Pyrrhus is said to have dreamt of emulating Alexander and laid out plans to conquer the west to Cineas, which speaks to his (misguided) ambition more than his arrogance.

For the Romans, the Pyrrhic War became something more and something less at the same time. Its position on the edges of Roman historical memory contributed to the Roman conception of the conflict. The transitory nature of the Pyrrhic War is a manifestation of Rome entering into a historical age. The Punic Wars were real and solid, discussed in detail by historians who had access to those that lived and participated in them. The period before the third century was a time of legend slowly becoming more grounded as the narratives approached the end of the fourth century, but relying on piecemeal information preserved by self-aggrandizing families, and sparse documents. The Pyrrhic War straddled these two eras, taking on characteristics the Romans imagined for both. While the war may have been preserved in the memories of the children and grandchildren of those that participated, it was ultimately malleable enough to be worked and reworked by later generations in their own

constructed narratives.

The Pyrrhic War lost its nuance as a multipolar regional conflict rooted in local conflicts as it became a morality tale, a duel between two foes admirable in their own ways, tricked into fighting. Pyrrhus became an avatar for his cousin Alexander the Great. A man whose skill surpassed that of Hannibal and who came to admire his Roman opponents, and in turn they him. Like his cousin, Pyrrhus had his faults, especially his hubris, but he is depicted as an extraordinary individual who pushed the Romans to their limits. It was not the king who was the villain of this story, it was the Tarentines, whose decadence and unfounded haughtiness forced them to seek outside help, and the Carthaginians, who revealed their perfidious nature at nearly every turn. Both peoples justified the next stage of Roman expansion as the Pyrrhic War itself finished the realization of a Roman Italy. The Romans were victorious because of the virtues of their ancestors that remained vibrant in that generation of heroes. The complex realities of the conflict are subsumed within a constructed Roman narrative. The Pyrrhic War becomes a bridge from Rome's ancient past to the incredible challenges of the Punic Wars that resulted in the creation of an empire that would itself reshape the Roman people.

Notes

- 1 *Ante hunc diem nihil praeter pecora Vulscorum, greges Sabinorum, carpenta Gallorum, fracta Samnitium arm vidisses: tum si captivos aspiceres, Molossi, Thessali, Macedones, Britti, Apulus atque Lucanus; si pompam, aurum, purpura, signa, tabulae Tarentinaeque deliciae.* Florus 1.13.27.
- 2 οὐκ ἴσχυσε δὲ νικῆσαι τὴν πεπωμένην, DH 20.12.2.
- 3 For a discussion of Pyrrhus' death, see Lévêque (1957) 622–626. None of the ancient accounts inspire any real confidence in their accuracy as they tend to veer into the unbelievable.
- 4 DH 20.14; Val. Max. 4.3.9; Eutrop. 2.15; Justin 18.2.9; Livy *Per.* 14; Dio fr. 41; Zon. 8.6. Unlike the rest, the Dio/Zonaras claims that Ptolemy sent envoys to Rome first rather than the other way around.
- 5 *MRR* 1:196.
- 6 Peirano (2010) 51–53.
- 7 Oros. *Hist.* 4.3.1–2; 4.5.2; Livy *Per.* 14.
- 8 Livy *Per.* 14; 21.10.8; Dio fr. 43.1.
- 9 *Tum risum obortum Scipioni, et subiecisse* “*Quid nam tu diceres, si me vicisses?*” “*Tum vero me*” inquit “*et ante Alexandrum et ante Pyrrhum et ante alios omnes imperatores esse.*” Livy 35.14.11; cf. Plut. *Flam.* 21.3–4.
- 10 Livy 22.51.4; cf. Plut. *Fab.* 17.1; Lazenby (1998) 85–86.
- 11 Plb. 3.78.1; Livy 22.1.3.

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